

THE ECSTASIES OF
THOMAS DE QUINCEY



Photo. National Portrait Gallery

Thomas De Quincey

THE ECSTASIES OF
THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Chosen by
THOMAS BURKE



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

Published 1928
by GEORGE G HARRAP & CO LTD
39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W C 2

Printed in Great Britain by R & R CLARK, LIMITED
Edinburgh

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	7
THE STORMS OF LONDON	31
THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH	75
THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM	141
THE PAINS OF OPIUM	161
THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD	185
TRIAL AND DEATH OF JOAN OF ARC	209
THE DAUGHTER OF LEBANON	223
SAVANNAH-LA-MAR	233
LEVANA AND OUR LADIES OF SORROW	239
THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS	249
APPENDIX	305



INTRODUCTION

IN making this selection from the vast and varied range of De Quincey's writings I have limited myself to those papers in which he realized poetic ideas in a prose invested with the pomp and colour of the symphonic orchestra. Purple you may call this prose if you like, but it is imperial purple. We have had many writers who have made our language sing: from no other writer since Sir Thomas Browne does it come to the ear with such processional peal and rhythm. It must be remembered that when De Quincey came into letters—somewhat late, and accidentally—he wished to come as a poet. This arose from his early worship of and friendship with Wordsworth and Coleridge. He quickly saw, though, that poetry was not his form; but he was still in essence a poet, and in the new style which he gave to prose we may perceive the quasi-poet seeking a habitation near the gates of poetry. This style annoys the academic, and certainly the luxuriance of metaphor does at times become over-luxuriant to the point of delirium. But if you are going to view work of De Quincey's kind judiciously you may as well not view it at all. You like it or you don't, and there is no arguing about it. Faults it has, but, whatever the professors may say, those faults do not make it fustian. If they choose to call it fustian, then English literature, to its glory, is three-quarters fustian and only one-quarter college linen.

Although these papers come from a thwarted poet, they are not prose poems. The thing called the prose poem is usually neither the one nor the other, nor anything else. Nor are they merely word-rhapsodies. They stand by themselves, the strangest things in our literature by the strangest

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

being in our literature. They want, however, some more exact description than his own term, "impassioned prose." The nearest, I think, is that which I have used—*Ecstasies*—for surely they were written in a mood when the writer was, in the poetic, not the medical, meaning, out of his mind, or beside himself. Indeed, he has told us that it was under a "strange glow of spirits," lending a respite from his customary gloom, that the greater part of the *Confessions* was written, and the later papers clearly were written in a sister-mood. If that "strange glow of spirits" was not ecstasy, what was it?

Genius takes queer forms. It never took queerer form than that of the night-born De Quincey. It never produced queerer work. I doubt that any other writer has covered so wide a territory of imagination and intellect. There are few kinds of writing that this man, who never intended himself for a writer, left undone, little learning that he had not at least tasted. He gathered his learning, not with the cold interest of the scholar, but with the enthusiasm of the artist, and somewhere in his work he touches each hill and valley of the mind. Often his enthusiasm sends him trespassing outside its map. Literary criticism, biography, romance, astrology, politics, speculative philosophy, ethics, theology, Greek and Roman history, general history (his last literary project was a new history of England in twelve volumes), archæology, education, murder, population, dreams—all these matters and many more he touched and illuminated; and when he died he left to us that close-veined but seldom-quarried country of the mind—the fourteen volumes of his collected works.

But it is by these papers that he lives and will live. He himself has drawn the distinction between dead literature and living; between what he calls

INTRODUCTION

the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. The literature of knowledge is from time to time superannuated : much of his own critical and speculative writing has been. The literature of power lives through the centuries, breathing always with its first full vigour. These papers are his contribution to that literature, and they are as freshly strange to-day as when they were first written. Their matter alone would make them extraordinary : their ecstasy makes them unique. The scene in the death-chamber of his little sister—the collision of the mail-coach—the November day in the Welsh mountains—the murderer pacing through Ratcliffe Highway—the night in the ball-room of the Shrewsbury inn—the Greek Street house and its ten-year-old drudge—the exquisite idyll of Ann—Fanny of the Bath Road—the laudatum dreams—all these pictures of an actual life are charged with a power that carries them from autobiography into the immortal world of the fancies of the poets and the novelists. The light in which they are bathed is not the sunlight of the gods, or their twilight ; nor the pale lustre of faery. It is the electric ray of the land of gramarye, and even while you are bespelled by it you are aware of such an unease as you feel under a London noonday of night-darkness.

Thomas De Quincey was himself bathed in that light. He was a goblin ; a furtive, flitting creature whom nobody ever really saw. In all the attempted memories of those who knew him is an accent of hesitation, as though they are not fully certain what or whom they are speaking of, or what they mean to say. The picture is blurred, as though the model were continually shifting—as he was. They did not fail to see his genius ; they did fail to see *him*. In a homely phrase, they didn't know what to make of him, and to this day nobody knows

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

what to make of him. He lived always a hidden and uncommunicative life. His motives were secret and his actions furtive. He confided in nobody, but went his solitary way, carrying out his projects without a word to any but those immediately concerned. He achieved even in his lifetime a high place in literature, but made no attempt to claim it, and as late as his old age, when editors were anxious to have anything of his, he would hawk his manuscripts round to new magazines with the diffident air of the beginner. All his life he wanted to hide. Like many literary geniuses, he hated writing and hated the literary life, and more than once he expressed the wish to make a little money and then to "slink into some dark corner, educate my children, and show my face to the world no more."

All that Bohn can tell us of him—and Bohn saw him regularly over a long period—is that "he always seemed to speak in a kind of whisper." Nothing but that. Lamb, who knew him well, and who chatted so much in his letters about his friends, has nothing at all to say about him. Wordsworth was a close acquaintance, and he too has left us nothing save one or two of those arctic memoranda in which he acknowledged his contemporaries. Southey was much in contact with him, but certainly never saw him. In his anger at De Quincey's remarks upon him in some recollections he betrayed his misconception of the man by expressing the wish that somebody, in the cause of good manners, would go to Edinburgh and thrash the little wretch. (It would be in accord with Southey's exhibition of manners to point out the now respective positions of the Prince Regent's Laureate and the "little wretch." But we will let it pass.) Carlyle alone seems to have had a clear glimpse—"Eccovi! Look at him—this child has been in hell!"

INTRODUCTION

But these goblin creatures are never truly known to anybody, and do not wish to be known. Poe was one; Swift, Sterne, Blake, Borrow, Dickens, were others. They defied all attempts at portraiture. This may be, of course, because they were never seen by people of their own kind. The gods in their sport delight to bring genius into contact with people of faint spiritual perception, or of perception strong enough, but operating in another dimension; and to say to such people "Tell us about the genius you knew so well" is like asking a ten-year-old schoolboy for his impressions of married life. He has been brought into contact with married life in his home, but he has never seen it. I think no man can fully understand another unless both be born under the same star. Their vibrations must be in the same *tempo*. That, perhaps, is the explanation of our 'taking to' or being repelled by people on a first meeting, and it may explain why we have so few biographies that really illuminate their subject.

Of the scores of people who knew Poe not one succeeds in giving a fixed picture of him. Of all Shelley's friends not one really knew him, though one man *would* have known him had they ever met—Francis Thompson. You may read the whole of Forster, page by page, and at the end, though you know all that happened to Charles Dickens, you do not know Charles Dickens. Nothing clear emerges, as it emerges from the pages of Boswell, for there was nothing clear to work upon. Dickens, in his personality, was the very opposite of De Quincey; one was flame and salt, the other whisper and twilight. Yet each, by different methods, concealed himself. One flashed through life; the other crept through it. Both left puzzled faces staring after them. No man could pierce the dazzle of Dickens; none could pierce De Quincey's cloak

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

of confession. He has told us more about himself than has any other writer, and we know him less than we know the fleeting minor characters of fiction. Read all the De Quincey authorities—Japp, Hill-Burton, Masson, Hogg—and at the end De Quincey has eluded you, as he eludes you in the *Confessions*; as all confessionalists elude you.

There is no hiding-place so impenetrable as autobiography, whether written or spoken; for autobiography is truth at two removes from the actual—the story behind the story; and the curious reader or listener who seeks the way back to the actual finds that it is by a hundred unblazed cross-roads. To the acute mind, the man who hides in silence is never so puzzling as the man who hides in a perpetual flow of talk: ten thousand clues are of less use than none, and any man who is in danger of attention from posterity, and wishes to hide certain things, will find no better hiding-place than under the arc-lights of autobiography. Borrow hid himself there. Byron lived his whole life in public, talking about himself; nobody knew Byron. Walt Whitman shouted his soul to the world, and the man Walt Whitman is still as misty to us as though he were the mummy of a King of Thebes. Against the secretiveness of his personal life, De Quincey set the public outpouring of confession, and by using both methods he completely hid himself.

I do not mean that his autobiographic sketches are not true. They are true; but, like most intimate confessions, they are neither accurate nor full; and I shall show later how, carelessly or wilfully, he so covered his tracks as to make his biographers contradict themselves and each other. The more serious a man is in the unlocking of his heart, the more regard he has for reticence upon those matters that are, to him, the precious matters

INTRODUCTION

of his life, and the more concerned he is that the key shall not fall into the hands of alien pryers. A shy man writing his confessions—and most confessions have been written by shy men—would not and does not disclose the facts of his life in any fashion that allows them to be proved upon him. Some facts he may wish to suppress, and for the rest he is concerned, not with facts, but with truth. Dates mean nothing, for they play no part in the lives of any of us. It is only the clod, with nothing of interest to say, and nothing strange or delicate to hide, who points his memoirs with precision of dates and names and places. Truth knows no time or place, and when a man wishes to tell the truth about himself as he sees it, and when, to his own satisfaction, he has discovered the truth, he can often tell it more faithfully by ignoring fact or even by colouring it; and often the falsification ‘rings true’ where the fact would not. The everlasting truth that is common to all men—that is all that we have a right to expect from the story of another man’s life. From human curiosity we may wish to pry into all the things that we are not told, but we have no right to know those things, and no autobiography has told them.

Certainly De Quincey has not told them, frank as the *Confessions* appear to be; for the elucidating and checking of the facts of his life is a task that has beaten all his biographers. Again and again they are forced to plead, “His movements about this time are somewhat obscure,” “He seems to have been in London during this year, but there is no certain evidence,” “The next few years are an absolute blur,” and so on. So far as the facts are known it was an uneventful life, but partnered, like so many uneventful lives, by inward tempest and uproar. Of that inward life he allows us, here

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and there, hints and glimpses, but never enough to help us to a real knowledge of him. The outward life can be briefly sketched.

• He was born in Manchester on August 15, 1785. He was the son of a well-to-do merchant—himself a small practitioner in letters—and was brought up in the comfort of the well-to-do home of those days, among a group of lively brothers and sisters. Like the bulk of the English middle class, they had little to mark them from any other family of their rank, except the harbouring of a rebel. The timid, sickly Thomas could not be middle-class, and it was not long before he revolted. He was educated first by a private tutor; then at Bath Grammar School; then at a small private school in Wiltshire; and from fifteen to seventeen at Manchester Grammar School. This last school he hated, and even more he hated the warty materialism of Manchester. So, at seventeen, he ran away, and went on foot to Chester, where his mother was living, to report himself and his revolt. By an arrangement with her, backed by an uncle to whom this display of spirit was agreeable, his escapade was condoned, his schooling was terminated, and he was allowed a guinea a week with which he could do as he pleased. What he pleased to do during that summer was to go walking through North Wales. But in November of that year a sudden madness seized him. London called him. Once in London, he thought, he would be able to erase his middle-class background, make a career for himself, and live independently. By his abilities he could have done that, but he reckoned without his diffident and wayward temperament. A more helpless being in the material matters of life never lived, and for such a being to expect success in such a venture was already proven folly. But he was set upon it. He promptly wrote to

INTRODUCTION

his guardians, forswearing his guinea a week, and with six guineas in his pocket he threw himself upon the city. Of the resulting fiasco the *Confessions* tell.

With the turn of the year, however, a reconciliation was effected, and in the later part of 1803 he was entered at Worcester College, Oxford, with a fixed allowance of one hundred pounds a year, and no more. Little is known of his Oxford days. His vacations he spent in London, in Bristol (meeting Coleridge), and at the Lakes (meeting Wordsworth). For five years he was at Oxford, but he kept his terms casually, as the mood suited him, and, though noticed as a brilliant scholar, he never sat for his degree. After Oxford he entered at Middle Temple for the Bar, but, though he ate his dinners, his shiftless habits and the undirected way of life into which he had fallen made his studies again wasted effort, and again he never sat.

Arising out of his meetings with Wordsworth, the fancy took him to settle in Grasmere. Wordsworth was moving to a somewhat larger house, and suggested his taking over his vacated cottage. This he did in 1809, and now found himself in the society of his idol and of a literary group made up of Southey, "Christopher North," Coleridge, and some less eminent names. Throughout this period he lived in idleness, under the bondage of laudanum, on the money that had come to him as his inheritance. But in 1816 he married Margaret Simpson, daughter of a dalesman, and, though the early years of marriage were spent in idleness and laudanum, he soon found it necessary to make a supreme challenge to his thralldom and to look about for work. He did both successfully; and the man who even then would have honoured the most serious monthly review as its editor, and was later to honour English literature, became the editor of

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

an obscure local sheet—the *Westmorland Gazette*. The engagement of such a man on such a paper, as may be imagined, did not last long—barely a year—but it was useful, since it gave him his first experience of literary work and showed him his path.

Seeking here and there for further literary occupation, after a disappointment in Edinburgh, where he had hoped for something from “Christopher North,” then editor of *Blackwood’s*, he turned again to London; and there his literary career began. Through Charles Lamb, whom he had met on previous visits, he was introduced to the proprietors of the *London Magazine*, then in its first blaze of contributions from Lamb, Hazlitt, Allen Cunningham, Thomas Hood, Barry Cornwall, Talfourd, and Carlyle. In that magazine his first piece of serious writing appeared, and that first piece was the first portion of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. It attracted immediate attention; indeed, it killed all other contributions to the issue in which it appeared; and, though his fortune was not made, the name of “The Opium-Eater” was. He continued to feed the *London* with contributions under that pseudonym, and they were glad to have every scrap he sent them; but his heart was away from London, with his wife and children in Grasmere; and in 1826 he surrendered his London fame and left the city, never to return.

His next step was to Edinburgh, where *Blackwood’s* was now ready to welcome him. Here he was kept busy with work and with occasional visits to Grasmere; but in 1830, finding the separation from wife and family unbearable, he sold his Grasmere home and moved completely to Edinburgh, where, save for a year or two in Glasgow, 1841-43, the rest of his life was spent. It was a life of constant work, made harder by long spells of mental depres-

INTRODUCTION

sion, and clouded by the loss of those he loved. In 1833 his youngest son died. Two years later his eldest son died. Two years after that his wife, Margaret, died—the bitterest blow of all. Little is known of Margaret De Quincey. She sat always in the background of his life. She was one of his secrets, one of the things that no man ever tells, though he write ten volumes of autobiography.

From now on his life was divided between literary labour and the care of his remaining children, until they were old enough to enter upon life. With the idea of making things easier for him, his eldest daughter, not yet twenty, removed the younger children to a cottage at Lasswade, a mile or so outside the town, so that he might work in peace and have a country retreat whenever he wanted it. This cottage became the centre of his life until his death in December 1859. He was still occupied at his lodgings, 42 Lothian Street, in seeing the last volume of his collected writings through the press when he quietly collapsed. His condition was so critical that he could not be removed to the cottage, yet for six weeks he lingered, nursed by two of his daughters. At last the end came, and in the early morning of December 8 this strange, tormented life ceased without suffering or struggle.

Looking over that life, one sees a peak-fact that rises above all others. That peak-fact is London.

London was his crisis. He had four London periods: first, in 1802, after the bolt from North Wales; second, in 1804, during his undergraduate days; third, 1806–9, when he was keeping his terms for the Bar; and, last, 1821–26, when he was writing for the *London Magazine*. The important periods were those of 1802 and 1804. The first created that weakened state of health upon which he lays his bondage to laudanum; in the second he sold himself for life into that bondage. It was

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

these days that formed, or twisted, much of his inward life and fixed the hue of his writing. Queer enough in any event that writing would have been, for even as a child he was abnormally imaginative, and his imagination had rich stores of learning to play upon; but without the London years the orchestra of that imagination would have lacked the dark-toned instruments that compose that unique hue. London gave him a shock from which he never recovered: a shock that meant a load of suffering for him and a load of treasure for us. For the rest of his life he was to have always before his eyes the racing phantasmagoria of London faces and in his ears its tumultuous footfalls.

Its first effect was to bewilder him. By its size and constant motion alone it would and does do that to any sensitive provincial coming to it with no other idea of cities than that afforded by the little towns of inner England. To most it does no more than that, and then only for a brief space. To the insensitive it does nothing. But for the artist there is something more: there is its Sphinx-like spirit. This spirit De Quincey was quick to recognize and dismayed to face. Coming close upon his wonder, the recognition of it filled him, as it fills all artists, with terror—the terror that arises from contemplation of the most dreadful conception possible to the human mind: the conception of something that has no beginning and no ending. It is the wreck of all the laws that the mind has built. Because his mind must have some rock on which to rest man has invented gods and built upon them his ideas of a directed universe. Once that rock is overthrown, and he is asked to realize no beginning and no ending, his mind must wander—which is our synonym for madness. London does end, but its end is not visible from any central point, or even after miles of walking; and it was

INTRODUCTION

this conception of unending immensity that paralysed De Quincey.

Just as men, otherwise brave, will carry a lifelong fear of cats or water or lightning from some misadventure of childhood, so, from the age of seventeen, after those first few weeks of London, he carried a lifelong fear of London. A single whisper of that word rolls round the gallery of his memory and returns in a roar. London was his evil genius, or, in the Freudian jargon of to-day, his complex. It figured in his regular dreams and in his laudanum visions. It darkened his heart as he lay waiting for the London coach in the Shrewsbury inn. It struck him down and broke him; and it so haunted his life that whenever in his writing he seeks an image of ruthless power and dire immensity the word 'London' supplies it. Never was its shadow lifted. Under all the surging orchestration of his prose is a drone-bass of the storms of London.

If his ghost walks at all, it does not walk, I think, about the lanes of Lakeland or the classic pavements of Edinburgh, but under the million dreamy windows of midnight London. We return, if at all, not to the places that were sweet to us (for they give instead of taking), but to the places that were bitter to us and robbed us. They remain on our minds. Always, upon the palimpsest of De Quincey's mind, however he might sponge it, remained the records of London. They lived there as an everlasting pain that overran all earlier and later pain, and they lived because they had been impressed upon a mind stripped by laudanum of conscious and relative perception and left as automatically sensitive as a camera-plate. So it is these streets, if any, that the shy, gnome-like spirit haunts, pacing the stones between Oxford Street and Euston Road, searching for the immortal Ann and perhaps for the immortal druggist.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

In a passage of *The Pains of Opium* he speaks of the perplexities of his steps in London. Perplexing as they were to him in performance, they are doubly perplexing to those who would try to track them at a distance of one hundred and twenty-five years, or even to locate the points of his sojourns. Roughly, one may say that his London territory is Soho and East Marylebone—that is, that portion of Marylebone enclosed by Great Portland Street, Tottenham Court Road, Euston Road, and Oxford Street; and that portion of Soho from Greek Street to Golden Square. Indeed, it might be narrowed to one long streak of this territory which can be taken in a single eyeshot. If you stand at the far northern end of Great Titchfield Street, and look southward, you have a vista over Oxford Street and through Soho to the chimneys of the power-station on the edge of Golden Square, and you are seeing the important De Quincey London. Greek Street and Great Titchfield Street were his homes. In Oxford Street he bought his first laudanum. The corner of Great Titchfield Street was his nightly rendezvous with Ann, and in Golden Square he parted from her for ever. These scenes made the drive and stir of his inner life, and in later years they made the background of his memories and of those nights of horror when laudanum recalled them and diabolized them.

Not that they needed diabolizing, for in their native shape and air they were—and are—already devilish. Most of the streets are in spirit as they were in his time. Even then the houses were let out in cheap lodgings: they had 'come down' from their 1750 estate. The eighteenth-century houses have been rebuilt, but the new houses in their turn have 'come down.' London districts have their fashionable and unfashionable periods. They start in the mode; they decline; they rally;

INTRODUCTION

they decline again to the point of extinction, and rally yet again, until they collapse into slumdom. De Quincey knew the district in one of its decline periods, and to-day it is in another of those periods—except for the structure of its houses, just as he knew it. Cleveland Street, Bolsover Street, Clipstone Street—these streets, to my fancy, are a closer picture of the hell conceived by the old poets than the picturesque flames and torments by which they illustrated it. Outwardly decent, they are sadder to the eye and to the mind than the courts of any slum, more craven than the streets of any benighted Northern town. They have the unsympathetic pathos of the outmoded. They do not breathe—they sigh. Even on days of summer their distances are haunted by mournful mists, and the cry of the hawker—in itself the voice of squalor—floats through the mist like the cry of a being floating through a nebula, without habitation on planet or in space. Their hold on life is but a perfunctory commerce with life's leavings. Their shops are new shops offering used goods at second hand, or second-hand shops offering the meaner quality of the new goods; and of their houses some, with a last fingerhold on seemliness, offer meagrely respectable lodgings to the meagrely respectable; others offer a furtive and second-hand appeasement of lust. As they are to-day, so they were in his day.

When we examine the record of the laudanum visions it is clear that most of them had their basis here. They were indeed enchanted replicas of East Marylebone. To those unfamiliar with drugs it may seem incredible that such ornate tapestries could have grown upon these haggard streets, but opium works like that. The drug cannot supply the vision without material, and that material must be found in the conscious or subconscious mind. All it can

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

do is to recover and release forgotten things, or rebuild immediate things, in enhanced form ; and the more perceptive and richly stored the mind of the drug-taker the more fantastically magnificent will the vision be. This enchantment of common things is one of the startling and, unfortunately, alluring virtues of the drug. You, about to take opium or laudanum, may be sitting in a bedroom of a Bloomsbury or Bayswater lodging-house, amid the sad appointments of those places—a wallpaper of dim roses that once were flaming, an iron bedstead, a washstand and dressing-chest of deal, dingy curtains shutting out possible overlookers who could not possibly see through the rain-dimmed window, threadbare art-carpet, lifeless pictures—and lo ! fifteen minutes after taking the drug your own grief and the grief of the room will have vanished. You will not be in a dream. You will be wide awake, but with heightened faculties of eye and ear. You will still be in that room, and none of its arrangements and appointments will have been moved. One might think that these heightened faculties would be so much the more repelled by the room, but, though nothing has been moved, all is changed, rehabilitated in a world of light and colour. As the drug is of Oriental earth, so it works upon brain and eye in Oriental imagery. The room towers to the dimensions of a mountain pavilion of Cathay, embellished with all the fancies that opium can derive from the recesses of your consciousness. The wallpaper is a silken banner ; its faded roses become emblems of pagan frenzy. The drab quilt of your bed blazes with the flowers of the Hanging Gardens. The bed itself is an imperial couch, and its knobs are minarets. The tinkle of an organ in the street below becomes as rich in its texture as a score of Berlioz, and the tiny crepitations of a mouse in the wainscot become a salvo of artillery.

INTRODUCTION

There comes, too, the phenomenon of the interchange of senses, when a melody can be *seen* and a picture can be *heard*.

But, as I say, all this false splendour comes, not from opium, but from its release of your own projections; and no man ever saw or heard in a drug-trance anything that did not somewhere live in his own mind. So in De Quincey's visions of Assyrian terraces those familiar with the workings of drugs can see the laudanum-heightened memory of the terraces of Oxford Street and the labyrinths of Marylebone, and in the mournful processions through the valleys of Lebanon we can see the daily and nightly promenade of urgent London people upon their urgent occasions.

For many years I lived in and daily traversed this district, and I first read De Quincey on his own territory. He was the first author I seriously read, and the *Confessions* was the first book I bought. One's first book, bought at one's own choice, holds always an enchantment above all others, and for me this book had not only that enchantment and the enchantment of its matter: I was captured by it because Oxford Street was the evil genius of it, and I, at the same age as De Quincey, was then working in the very streets that were his, and living much the same life. In that record I found distilled the essence of the London that I knew. He had set down all that I vaguely felt about those places, but could not clearly perceive until he illuminated them, and because of him they came to life. Marylebone became a part of a legend, and I saw that it was the fit spot for just such a legend. Soho Square was a 'scene'; and even the uncharactered Oxford Street assumed a character. Thereafter in all my wanderings he walked at my side, more positive to me than any of the living bodies that jostled about me. All my immediate

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

enemies were in that book—the ache of poverty, the sleety misery of Cleveland Street, and the infamy of wet Sunday afternoons . . . and I could imagine what they had done to the young scholar of fastidious mind and diffident manners in those November days of 1802 and 1804.

Even to-day a wet Sunday in Oxford Street plunges one into the abominable; in 1804 it must have sent one to the bottom; and I think those who have paced out such a Sunday and those whose imaginations can evoke it for them will agree that by itself, and without the imposed venom of neuralgia, it excuses, if it does not pardon, the lonely scholar's surrender to laudanum. Whether he would have fallen to laudanum without the push of a London Sunday and neuralgia is an idle question, to which the answer is, Yes and no. He did fall, and he fell by those agencies. Predisposed as he was by nature to take any way of flight from the world's pain, it is probable that other agencies would soon have worked for him. But it was by the agencies of London and neuralgia that he opened for himself a lifetime of physical and mental suffering, and in seeking for apologies it is these that he names.

A soul in torment knows deeps and shades of suffering from which the mass of men are happily held, but vaster deeps and darker shades are known by those whose torments are of their own creating. Always, if he had never touched laudanum, he would have suffered. At six years old he had a capacity for suffering beyond that of most adults. Laudanum enlarged it and laid new channels for it, and in his deepest pain, pain created by the laudanum excesses, the keenest stab came from the knowledge that he himself had laid and dug those fresh facilities. The sorrows of the afflicted are temperate and endurable because of their outward

INTRODUCTION

visitation, but the sorrows of Burns and Poe and Coleridge and De Quincey, and all the self-afflicted, are made keener by the teeth of remorse. In a passage where he was wearing the purple (but not, at that moment, as an emperor) he cries :

Oh, spirit of merciful interpretation, angel of forgiveness to youth and its aberrations, wilt thou charm away that mighty phantom, born amidst the gathering mists of remorse, which strides after me in pursuit from forgotten days—towering for ever into proportions more and more colossal, overhanging and overshadowing my head as if close behind, yet dating its nativity from hours that are fled by more than half a century? Oh, heavens! that it should be possible for a child not seventeen years old, by a momentary blindness, by listening to a false, false whisper from his own bewildered heart, by one erring step, by a motion this way or that, to change the currents of his destiny, to poison the fountains of his peace, and in the twinkling of an eye to lay the foundations of a lifelong repentance!

The misery had been real enough, but he was here dramatizing it, and it is not conveyed so forcibly as in a brief scene of his old age in the streets of Edinburgh. A friend, John Findlay, met him one summer evening on Dean Bridge. He was supposed to be on his way to a dinner, but explained to Findlay that his mental state was so bad that he had turned back; and in giving his reasons as he rested on the bridge he suddenly broke away with, "Oh, my God, the misery I've been born to endure!" There is something more in that cry than the symptomatic self-pity of the drug-taker, though it traces back to the drug.

Yet perhaps without laudanum he would have died young. From earliest childhood he was a neurotic, but a neurotic—the combination is not unknown to medicine—with a stout constitution.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Without that constitution he could not have survived the immense doses of laudanum ; as it was, they may have saved him, for a stout constitution does not necessarily mean a long life. Many bodies live and thrive on poison, and if they do not discover the poison that they need they die. I have known two cases where poison should have killed and did not. These cases were condemned, twenty and twenty-two years ago, by more than one doctor. In each case the man, having no concern for his health, turned to some kind of poison for ease from the ordeal of waiting. They are not healthy men to-day, but they are alive and still using their poison. We are not justified in assuming that the poison saved them—the doctors may have been wrong—but there is the fact that they were sick men, and the continued daily poison, which might have killed a healthy man, did not kill them. De Quincey must have been of this type, for certainly he fed for many years on poison. His daughters have told us, and his Edinburgh friends confirm them, that only at long intervals did he eat a meal. Even after he had conquered laudanum he lived mainly on fluids—coffee, tea, soup, and a little vegetable. It is not, therefore, a wild surmise that had he not discovered laudanum he would not have lived to the age of seventy-four, and without laudanum a striking *motif* would be missing from the scheme of English literature.

The shop of the Oxford Street chemist, the “beatific druggist” who sold him his first dose, is, like most De Quincey haunts, no longer standing. Where he did not cover his own tracks, accident did it for him. One point only of his London sojourns remains as it was. This is the house of Brunell, the money-lender’s jackal. In this house, through the bleak November days of 1802, as yet unwarmed and uncoloured by the purple drops, he

INTRODUCTION

slept on the floor with the little household drudge. It is No. 61 Greek Street. He gives somewhere a direction to it, and tells us that it stood "at the north-west corner of Greek Street, being the house on that side the street nearest to Soho Square." "North-west corner" locates it, but, seeing that both sides of Greek Street run parallel into Soho Square, the further direction is confusing. The house to-day is little altered. It is now occupied by a shipping and forwarding company, and the ground floor is fitted as a shop. In the upper part it is unaltered from his description of it, and in one matter it is precisely now as then. He speaks of its windows being "coated by a paste, composed of ancient soot and superannuated rain." When I passed it on the day of writing this page its upper window was just so coated. This is a disfigurement incidental to the business of any warehouse, but as the building wears a London County Council plaque celebrating De Quincey's use of the house it is pretty to amuse oneself with the fancy that the window is deliberately so kept to his memory.

His other London points are three, namely, 4 York Street, Covent Garden, 5 Northumberland Street, Marylebone, and 82 Great Titchfield Street. In an upper back room of 4 York Street the *Confessions* and some later things were written. At that time Lamb was living in Russell Street, a minute's walk from York Street, and this near neighbourhood to Lamb may have decided De Quincey's choice of these lodgings. Some alterations have been made here since the time when the premises were occupied by Bohn the publisher. The lower part is now a florist's shop, and the rooms upstairs where a masterpiece was written are used as a shaving saloon. (No detail of daily life gave De Quincey more acute distress than being shaved.) No. 5 Northumberland Street has gone. This little,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

street, leading from Marylebone Road to Paddington Street, has suffered much change. One side is covered by 'mansion' flats, the other by Marylebone Workhouse. At the southern end are four old houses of the kind that originally composed the street. They are renumbered 1A to 4, the workhouse, presumably, being No. 1. The No. 5 at which he lodged—and where, so far as one may trust the dating of his letters, he took the laudanum he had bought in Oxford Street—must therefore have stood on the site now covered by the workhouse.

But there is no knowing certainly that he was lodging at any given place at any given time, so often was he shifting and so casual was his memory. His first biographer, "H. A. Page" (Alex. H. Japp), whose book has never been superseded, makes a statement about his London lodgings—no doubt from information supplied by De Quincey—which is contradicted by De Quincey's own letters. Page says that "about this time [1808] he was living in Great Titchfield Street, but removed to Marylebone to share rooms with a college friend." But from letters addressed to him and letters from him it is clear that the reverse happened—he moved in 1808 *from* Marylebone to Great Titchfield Street. All Wordsworth's letters of 1809 about the *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet, which De Quincey was seeing through the press for him, are addressed to Great Titchfield Street, while from 1806–8 letters from his mother and other correspondents are addressed to Northumberland Street.


The 82 Great Titchfield Street of his time has also gone. This, with two or three houses adjoining, has been rebuilt in one corner-block of shops below and flats above; so that only two known London haunts remain—Greek Street, his first home (or tenement), and York Street, his last. Perhaps,

INTRODUCTION

though, one may add one other spot, a spot which I call his monument. He is buried in Edinburgh in an obscure corner of the West Churchyard, and his only memorial is a dull stone slab set against a wall that gives on to a public street. Without deliberate search it would not be seen. But what I call his London monument stands in a highway. It is not a monument raised to his memory, for little notice was taken of his death, and only a few of his intimates guessed that this grey goblin was to outsoar his then superiors, to leave them rooted in their day while he passed into the centuries of English literature. It stood in some shape before he was born, and in its present shape when he was eight years old. But its name recurs like a fugue-theme through the pages of the *Confessions*, and in default of any other monument this is his as markedly as though it bore his name and effigy. It stands in the street that framed his darkest hours, almost facing Great Titchfield Street, and so long as it stands he is not without his cenotaph in the jungle where he lost his way. Under its portico he and Ann sheltered, and on its steps, where now circulates the business, not of the purple drug, but of the Old Tarragona, he must often have slept in those homeless nights of 1802. What more fitting monument could be devised for this master of language and learning than a building called the Pantheon?

THOMAS BURKE

THE STORMS OF LONDON



The Storms of London

THE day on which I left Oswestry was a day of golden sunshine amongst the closing days of November. As truly as Jessica's moonlight (*Merchant of Venice*), this golden sunshine might be said to *sleep* upon the woods and the fields; so awful was the universal silence, so profound the death-like stillness. It was a day belonging to a brief and pathetic season of farewell summer resurrection, which, under one name or other, is known almost everywhere. In North America it is called the "Indian Summer." In North Germany and Midland Germany it is called the "Old Wives' Summer," and more rarely the "Girls' Summer." It is that last brief resurrection of summer in its most brilliant memorials, a resurrection that has no root in the past, nor steady hold in the future, like the lambent and fitful gleams from an expiring lamp, mimicking what is called the "lightning before death" in sick patients, when close upon their end. There is the feeling of a conflict that has been going on between the lingering powers of summer and the strengthening powers of winter, not unlike that which moves by antagonist forces in some deadly inflammation hurrying forwards through fierce struggles into the final repose of mortification. For a time the equilibrium has been maintained between the hostile forces; but at last the antagonism is overthrown; the victory is accomplished for the powers that fight on the side of death; simultaneously with the conflict, the pain of conflict has departed: and thenceforward the gentle process of collapsing life, no longer fretted by counter-movements, slips away with holy peace into the noiseless deeps of the Infinite. So sweet, so ghostly, in its soft, golden smiles, silent as a dream, and quiet as the dying

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

trance of a saint, faded through all its stages this departing day, along the whole length of which I bade farewell for many a year to Wales, and farewell to summer. In the very aspect and the sepulchral stillness of the motionless day, as solemnly it wore away through morning, noontide, afternoon, to meet the darkness that was hurrying to swallow up its beauty, I had a fantastic feeling as though I read the very language of resignation when bending before some irresistible agency. And at intervals I heard—in how different a key!—the raving, the everlasting uproar of that dreadful metropolis, which at every step was coming nearer, and beckoning (as it seemed) to myself for purposes as dim, for issues as incalculable, as the path of cannon-shots fired at random and in darkness.

It was not late, but it was at least two hours after nightfall, when I reached Shrewsbury. Was I not liable to the suspicion of pedestrianism? Certainly I was: but, even if my criminality had been more unequivocally attested than it could be under the circumstances, still there is a *locus penitentiae* in such a case. Surely a man may repent of *any* crime; and therefore of pedestrianism. I might have erred; and a court of *pié poudré* (dusty foot) might have found the evidences of my crime on my shoes. Yet secretly I might be forming good resolutions to do so no more. Certainly it looked like this, when I announced myself as a passenger “booked” for that night’s mail. This character at once installed me as rightfully a guest of the inn, however profligate a life I might have previously led as a pedestrian. Accordingly I was received with special courtesy; and it so happened that I was received with something even like pomp. Four wax-lights carried before me by obedient mutes, these were but ordinary honours, meant (as old experience had instructed me) for the first engineering step toward

THE STORMS OF LONDON

effecting a lodgment upon the stranger's purse. In fact the wax-lights ~~are~~ used by innkeepers, both abroad and at home, to "try the range of their guns." If the stranger submits quietly, as a good anti-pedestrian ought surely to do, and fires no counter gun by way of protest, then he is recognised at once as passively within range, and amenable to orders. I have always looked upon this fine of five or seven shillings (for wax that you do not absolutely need) as a sort of inaugural *honorarium* entrance-money, what in jails used to be known as *smart* money, proclaiming me to be a man *comme il faut*; and no toll in this world of tolls do I pay so cheerfully. This, meantime, as I have said, was too customary a form to confer much distinction. The wax-lights, to use the magnificent Grecian phrase *ἐπόμνευε*, moved pompously before me, as the holy—holy fire, the inextinguishable fire and its golden hearth, moved before Cæsar *semper* Augustus, when he made his official or ceremonial *avatars*. Yet still this moved along the ordinary channels of glorification: it rolled along ancient grooves: I might say, indeed, like one of the twelve Cæsars when dying, *Ut puto, Deus fio* (It's my private opinion that at this very moment I am turning into a god), but still the metamorphosis was not complete. *That* was accomplished when I stepped into the sumptuous room allotted to me. It was a ball-room of noble proportions—lighted, if I chose to issue orders, by three gorgeous chandeliers, not basely wrapped up in paper, but sparkling through all their thickets of crystal branches, and flashing back the soft rays of my tall waxen lights. There were, moreover, two orchestras, which money would have filled within thirty minutes. And, upon the whole, one thing only was wanting—viz., a throne—for the completion of my *apotheosis*.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

It might be seven P.M. when first I entered upon my kingdom. About three hours later I rose from my chair, and with considerable interest looked out into the night. For nearly two hours I had heard fierce winds arising; and the whole atmosphere had, by this time, become one vast laboratory of hostile movements in all directions. Such a chaos, such a distracting wilderness of dim sights, and of those awful "sounds that live in darkness" (Wordsworth's *Excursion*), never had I consciously witnessed. Rightly, and by a true instinct, had I made my farewell adieus to summer. All through the day, Wales and her grand mountain ranges—Penmaenmawr, Snowdon, Cader Idris—had divided my thoughts with London. But now rose London—sole, dark, infinite—brooding over the whole capacities of my heart. Other object—other thought—I could not admit. Long before midnight, the whole household (with the exception of a solitary waiter) had retired to rest. Two hours, at least, were left to me, after twelve o'clock had struck, for heartshaking reflections. More than ever I stood upon the brink of a precipice; and the local circumstances around me deepened and intensified these reflections, impressed upon them solemnity and terror, sometimes even horror. It is all but inconceivable to men of unyielding and callous sensibilities, how profoundly others find their reveries modified and overruled by the external characters of the immediate scene around them. Many a suicide that hung dubiously in the balances has been ratified, and carried into summary effect, through the forlorn, soul-revolting aspect of a crazy, dilapidated home. Oftentimes, without extravagance, the whole difference between a mind that spurns life and the same mind reconciled to life, turns upon the outside features of that particular domestic scenery which hourly besieges

THE STORMS OF LONDON

the eyes. I, in this Shrewsbury hotel, naturally contemplated a group of objects tending to far different results. And yet in some respects they agreed.

The unusual dimensions of the rooms, especially their towering height, brought up continually and obstinately, through natural links of associated feelings or images, the mighty vision of London waiting for me afar off. An altitude of nineteen or twenty feet showed itself unavoidably upon an exaggerated scale in some of the smaller side-rooms—meant probably for cards or for refreshments. This single feature of the rooms—their unusual altitude, and the echoing hollowness which had become the exponent of that altitude—this one terrific feature (for terrific it was in the effect), together with crowding and evanescent images of the flying feet that so often had spread gladness through these halls on the wings of youth and hope at seasons when every room rang with music—all this, rising in tumultuous vision, whilst the dead hours of night were stealing along, all around me—household and town—sleeping, and whilst against the windows more and more the storm outside was raving, and to all appearance endlessly growing, threw me into the deadliest condition of nervous emotion under contradictory forces, high over which predominated horror recoiling from that unfathomed abyss in London into which I was now so wilfully precipitating myself. Often I looked out and examined the night. Wild it was beyond all description, and dark as “the inside of a wolf’s throat.” But at intervals, when the wind, shifting continually, swept in such a direction as to clear away the vast curtain of vapour, the stars shone out, though with a light unusually dim and distant. Still, as I turned inwards to the echoing chambers, or outward to the wild, wild night, I saw London

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

expanding her visionary gates to receive me, like some dreadful mouth of Acheron (*Acherontis avari*). Thou also, Whispering Gallery! once again in those moments of conscious and wilful desolation didst to my ear utter monitorial sighs. For once again I was preparing to utter an irrevocable word, to enter upon one of those fatally tortuous paths of which the windings can never be unlinked.

Such thoughts, and visions without number corresponding to them, were moving across the *camera obscura* of my fermenting fancy, when suddenly I heard a sound of wheels; which, however, soon died off into some remote quarter. I guessed at the truth—viz., that it was the Holyhead Mail wheeling off on its primary duty of delivering its bags at the post-office. In a few minutes it was announced as having changed horses; and off I was to London.

All the mails in the kingdom, with one solitary exception (that of Liverpool), in those days, were so arranged as to reach London early in the morning. Between the hours of four and six A.M., one after the other, according to their station upon the roll, all the mails from the N[orth]—the E[ast]—the W[est]—the S[outh]—whence, according to some curious etymologists, comes the magical word *NEWS*—drove up successively to the post-office, and rendered up their heart-shaking budgets; none earlier than four o'clock, none later than six. I am speaking of days when all things moved slowly. The condition of the roads was then such, that, in order to face it, a corresponding build of coaches hyperbolically massive was rendered necessary: the mails were upon principle made so strong as to be the heaviest of all carriages known to the wit or the experience of man; and from these joint evils of ponderous coaches and roads that were quagmires, it was impossible for even the picked breed of

THE STORMS OF LONDON

English-coach-horses, all bone and blood, to carry forward their huge tonnage at a greater rate than six-and-a-half miles an hour. Consequently, it cost eight-and-twenty massy hours for us, leaving Shrewsbury at two o'clock in the dead of night, to reach the General Post-office, and faithfully to deposit upon the threshing-floors of Lombard Street, all that weight of love and hatred which Ireland had found herself able to muster through twenty-four hours in the great *dépôt* of Dublin, by way of donation to England.

On reflection, I have done myself some injustice. Not altogether without a plan had I been from the first, and in coming along I had matured it. My success in such a plan would turn upon my chance of borrowing on personal security. £200, without counting any interest upon it, would subdivide into four sums of £50. Now, what interval was it that divided me from my majority? Simply an interval of four years. London, I knew or believed, was the dearest of all cities for three items of expenditure: (1) servants' wages; (2) lodgings; (3) dairy produce. In other things, London was often cheaper than most towns. Now, in a London street, having no pretensions beyond those of decent respectability, it has always been possible for the last half century to obtain two furnished rooms at a weekly cost of half a guinea. This sum (or say £25) deducted would leave me annually about the same sum for my other expenses. Too certainly I knew that this would suffice. If, therefore, I could obtain the £200, my plan was to withdraw from the knowledge of all my connections until I should become *mei juris* by course of law. In such a case, it is true that I must have waived all the advantages, fancied or real, small or great, from residence at a university. But, as in fact I never drew the slightest advantage or emolument from any university, my

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

scheme when realised would have landed me in the same point which finally I attained by its failure. The plan was simple enough, but it rested on the assumption that I could melt the obduracy of money-lenders. On this point I had both hopes and fears. But more irritating than either was the *delay*, which eventually I came to recognise as an essential element in the policy of all money-lenders: in that way only can they raise up such claims on behalf of their law agents as may be fitted for sustaining their zeal.

I lost no time in opening the business which had brought me to London. By ten A.M., an hour when all men of business are presumed to be at their posts, personally or by proxy, I presented myself at the money-lender's office. My name was already known there: for I had, by letters from Wales, containing very plain and very accurate statements of my position in life and my pecuniary expectations (some of which statements it afterwards appeared that he had personally investigated and verified), endeavoured to win his favourable attention. The money-lender, as it turned out, had one fixed rule of action. He never granted a personal interview to any man; no, not to the most beloved of his clients. One and all—myself, therefore, among the crowd—he referred for information, and for the means of prosecuting any kind of negotiation, to an attorney, who called himself, on most days of the week, by the name of Brunell, but occasionally (might it perhaps be on *red-letter* days?) by the more common name of Brown. Mr Brunell-Brown, or Brown-Brunell, had located his hearth (if ever he had possessed one), and his household gods (when they were not in the custody of the sheriff), in Greek Street, Soho. The house was not in itself, supposing that its face had been washed now and

THE STORMS OF LONDON

then, at all disrespectful. But it wore an unhappy countenance of gloom and unsocial fretfulness, due in reality to the long neglect of painting, cleansing, and in some instances of repairing. There were, however, no fractured panes of glass in the windows; and the deep silence which invested the house, not only from the absence of all visitors, but also of those common household functionaries, bakers, butchers, beer-carriers, sufficiently accounted for the desolation, by suggesting an excuse not strictly true—viz., that it might be tenantless. The house already had tenants through the day, though of a noiseless order, and was destined soon to increase them. Mr Brown-Brunell, after reconnoitring me through a narrow side-window (such as is often attached to front-doors in London), admitted me cheerfully, and conducted me, as an honoured guest, to his private *officina diplomatum* at the back of the house. From the expression of his face, but much more from the contradictory and self-counteracting play of his features, you gathered in a moment that he was a man who had much to conceal, and much, perhaps, that he would gladly forget. His eye expressed wariness against surprise, and passed in a moment into irrepressible glances of suspicion and alarm. No smile that ever his face naturally assumed, but was pulled short up by some freezing counteraction, or was chased by some close-following expression of sadness. One feature there was of relenting goodness and nobleness in Mr Brunell's character, to which it was that subsequently I myself was most profoundly indebted for an asylum that saved my life. He had the deepest, the most liberal, and unaffected love of knowledge, but, above all, of that specific knowledge which we call literature. His own stormy (and no doubt oftentimes disgraceful) career in life, that had entangled him in perpetual feuds with his fellow-men, he ascribed, with

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

bitter imprecations, to the sudden interruption of his studies consequent upon his father's violent death, and to the necessity which threw him, at a boyish age, upon a professional life in the lower branches of law—threw him, therefore, upon daily temptations, by surrounding him with opportunities for taking advantages not strictly honourable, before he had formed any fixed principles at all. From the very first, Mr Brunell had entered zealously into such conversations with myself as either gave openings for reviving his own delightful remembrances of classic authors, or brought up sometimes doubts for solution, sometimes perplexities and cases of intricate construction for illustration and disentanglement. Hunger-bitten as the house and the household genius seemed, wearing the legend of *Famine* upon every mantelpiece or "coigne of vantage," and vehemently protesting, as it must have done through all its echoes, against the introduction of supernumerary mouths, nevertheless there was (and, I suppose, of necessity) a clerk, who bore the name of Pyment, or Pymont, then first of all, then last of all, made known to me as a possible surname. Mr Pyment had no *alias*—or not to my knowledge—except, indeed, in the vituperative vocabulary of Mr Brunell, in which most variegated nomenclature he bore many scores of opprobrious names, having no reference whatever to any real habits of the man, good or bad. At two rooms' distance, Mr Brunell always assumed a minute and circumstantial knowledge of what Pyment was doing then, and what he was going to do next. All which Pyment gave himself little trouble to answer, unless it happened (as now and then it did) that he could do so with ludicrous effect. What made the necessity for Pyment was the continual call for "an appearance" to be put in at some of the subordinate courts in Westminster—courts of conscience, sheriff courts,

THE STORMS OF LONDON

etc. But it happens often that he who is most indispensable, and gets through most work at one hour, becomes a useless burden at another ; as the hardest-working reaper seems, in the eyes of an ignoramus, on a wet, wintry day, to be a luxurious idler. Of these ups and downs in Pymment's working life, Mr Brunell made a most cynical use ; making out that Pymment not only did nothing, but also that he created much work for the afflicted Brunell. However, it happened occasionally that the truth vindicated itself, by making a call upon Pymment's physics—aggressive or defensive—that needed an instant attention. “Pymment, I say ; this way, Pymment—you're wanted, Pymment” In fact, both were big, hulking men, and had need to be so ; for sometimes, whether with good reason or none, clients at the end of a losing suit, or of a suit nominally gained, but unexpectedly laden with heavy expenses, became refractory, showed fight, and gave Pymment reason for saying that at least on this day he had earned his salary by serving an ejectment on a client whom on any other plan it might have been hard to settle with.

But I am anticipating. I go back, therefore, for a few explanatory words, to the day of my arrival in London. How beneficial to me would a little candour have been at that early period !, If (which was the simple truth, known to all parties but myself) I had been told that nothing would be brought to a close in less than six months, even assuming the ultimate adoption of my proposals, I should from the first have dismissed all hopes of this nature, as being unsuited to the practicabilities of my situation. It will be seen further on, that there was a real and sincere intention of advancing the money wanted. But it was then too late. And universally I believe myself entitled to say, that even honourable lawyers will not in a case of this nature

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

move at a faster pace : they will all alike loiter upon varied allegations through ~~six~~ months ; and for this reason, that any shorter period, they fancy, will hardly seem to justify, in the eyes of their client, the sum which they find themselves entitled to charge for their trouble and their preliminary correspondence. How much better for both sides, and more honourable, as more frank and free from disguises, that the client should say, " Raise this sum " (of, suppose, £400) " in three weeks, which can be done, if it can be done in three years, and here is a *bonus* of £100. Delay for two months, and I decline the whole transaction." Treated with that sort of openness, how much bodily suffering of an extreme order, and how much of the sickness from hope deferred, should I have escaped ! Whereas, under the system (pursued with me as with all clients) of continually refreshing my hopes with new delusions, whiling me on with pretended preparation of deeds, and extorting from me, out of every little remittance I received from old family friends casually met in London, as much as possible for the purchase of imaginary stamps, the result was, that I myself was brought to the brink of destruction through pure inanition ; whilst, on the other hand, those concerned in these deceptions gained nothing that might not have been gained honourably and rightfully under a system of plain dealing. As it was, subject to these eternal deceptions, I continued for seven or eight weeks to live most parsimoniously in lodgings. These lodgings, though barely decent in my eyes, ran away with at the least two-thirds of my remaining guineas. At length, whilst it was yet possible to reserve a solitary half-guinea towards the more urgent interest of finding daily food, I gave up my rooms ; and, stating exactly the circumstances in which I stood, requested permission of Mr Brunell to make use of his large house as a

THE STORMS OF LONDON

nightly asylum from the open air. Parliament had not then made it a *crime*, next door to a felony, for a man to sleep out-of-doors (as some twenty years later was done by our benign legislators); . as yet *that* was no crime. By the law I came to know sin; and looking back to the Cambrian hills from distant years, discovered to my surprise what a parliamentary wretch I had been in elder days, when I slept amongst cows on the open hillsides. Lawful as yet this was; but not, therefore, less full of misery. Naturally, then, I was delighted when Mr Brunell not only most readily assented to my request, but begged of me to come that very night, and turn the house to account as fully as I possibly could. The cheerfulness of such a concession brought with it one drawback. I now regretted that I had not, at a much earlier period, applied for this liberty; since I might thus have saved a considerable fund of guineas, applicable, of course, to all urgent necessities, but at this particular moment to one of clamorous urgency—viz., the purchase of blankets. O ancient women, daughters of toil and suffering, amongst all the hardships and bitter inheritances of flesh that ye are called upon to face, not one—not even hunger—seems in my eyes comparable to that of nightly cold. To seek a refuge from cold in bed, and then, from the thin, gauzy texture of the miserable, worn-out blankets, “not to sleep a wink,” as Wordsworth records of poor old women in Dorsetshire, where coals, from local causes, were at the very dearest—what a terrific enemy was *that* for poor old grandmothers to face in fight! How feelingly I learned at this time, as heretofore I had learned on the wild hillsides in Wales, what an unspeakable blessing is that of warmth! A more killing curse there does not exist for man or woman, than that bitter combat between the weariness that prompts sleep, and the keen, searching cold that

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

forces you from the first access of sleep to start up horror-stricken, and to seek warmth vainly in renewed exercise, though long since fainting under fatigue. However, even without blankets, it was a fine thing to have an asylum from the open air ; and to be assured of this asylum as long as I was likely to want it.

Towards nightfall I went down to Greek Street ; and found, on taking possession of my new quarters, that the house already contained one single inmate, a poor, friendless child, apparently ten years old ; but she seemed hunger-bitten ; and sufferings of that sort often make children look older than they are. From this forlorn child I learnt that she had slept and lived there alone for some time before I came ; and great joy the poor creature expressed, when she found that I was in future to be her companion through the hours of darkness. The house could hardly be called large—that is, it was not large on each separate storey ; but, having four storeys in all, it was large enough to impress vividly the sense of its echoing loneliness ; and, from the want of furniture, the noise of the rats made a prodigious uproar on the staircase and hall ; so that, amidst the real fleshly ills of cold and hunger, the forsaken child had found leisure to suffer still more from the self-created one of ghosts. Against these enemies I could promise her protection ; human companionship was in itself protection ; but of other and more needful aid I had, alas ! little to offer. We lay upon the floor, with a bundle of law-papers for a pillow, but with no other covering than a large horseman's cloak ; afterwards, however, we discovered in a garret an old sofa-cover, a small piece of rug, and some fragments of other articles, which added a little to our comfort. The poor child crept close to me for warmth, and for security against her ghostly enemies. When I was

THE STORMS OF LONDON

not more than usually ill, I took her into my arms, so that, in general, she was tolerably warm, and often slept when I could not ; for, during the last two months of my sufferings I slept much in the daytime, and was apt to fall into transient dozings at all hours. But my sleep distressed me more than my watching ; for, besides the tumultuousness of my dreams (which were only not so awful as those which I shall have hereafter to describe as produced by opium), my sleep was never more than what is called *dog-sleep* ; so that I could hear myself moaning ; and very often I was awakened suddenly by my own voice. About this time, a hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into a slumber, which has since returned upon me at different periods of my life—viz., a sort of twitching (I knew not where, but apparently about the region of the stomach), which compelled me violently to throw out my feet for the sake of relieving it. This sensation coming on as soon as I began to sleep, and the effort to relieve it constantly awaking me, at length I slept only from exhaustion ; and through increasing weakness (as I said before), I was constantly falling asleep, and constantly awaking. Too generally the very attainment of any deep repose seemed as if mechanically linked to some fatal necessity of self-interruption. It was as though a cup were gradually filled by the sleepy overflow of some natural fountain, the fulness of the cup expressing symbolically the completeness of the rest : but then, in the next stage of the process, it seemed as though the rush and torrent-like babbling of the redundant waters, when running over from every part of the cup, interrupted the slumber which in their earlier stage of silent gathering they had so naturally produced. Such and so regular in its swell and its collapse—in its tardy growth and its violent dispersion—did this endless alternation of

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

stealthy sleep and stormy awaking travel through stages as natural as the increments of twilight, or the kindlings of the dawn : no rest that was not a prologue to terror ; no sweet tremulous pulses of restoration that did not suddenly explode through rolling clamours of fiery disruption. Meantime, the master of the house sometimes came in upon us suddenly, and very early ; sometimes not till ten o'clock ; sometimes not at all. He was in constant fear of arrest. Improving on the plan of Cromwell, every night he slept in a different quarter of London ; and I observed that he never failed to examine, through a private window, the appearance of those who knocked at the door, before he would allow it to be opened. He breakfasted alone ; indeed, his tea equipage would hardly have admitted of his hazarding an invitation to a second person, any more than the quantity of esculent *material*, which, for the most part, was little more than a roll, or a few biscuits, purchased on his road from the place where he had slept. Or, if he *had* asked a party, as I once learnedly observed to him, the several members of it must have *stood* in the relation to each other (not *sat* in any relation whatever) of succession, and not of co-existence ; in the relation of parts of time, and not of the parts of space. During his breakfast, I generally contrived a reason for lounging in ; and, with an air of as much indifference as I could assume, took up such fragments as might chance to remain ; sometimes, indeed, none at all remained. In doing this, I committed no robbery, except upon Mr Brunell himself, who was thus obliged, now and then, to send out at noon for an extra biscuit ; but he, through channels subsequently explained, was repaid a thousandfold ; and, as to the poor child, *she* was never admitted into his study (if I may give that name to his chief depository of parchments, law-writings, etc.) ; that

THE STORMS OF LONDON

room was to her the Bluebeard room of the house, being regularly locked on his departure to dinner, about six o'clock, which usually was his final departure for the day. Whether this child were an illegitimate daughter of Mr Brunell, or only a servant, I could not ascertain; she did not herself know; but certainly she was treated altogether as a menial servant. No sooner did Mr Brunell make his appearance than she went below-stairs, brushed his shoes, coat, etc.; and, except when she was summoned to run upon some errand, she never emerged from the dismal Tartarus of the kitchens to the upper air, until my welcome knock towards nightfall called up her little trembling footsteps to the front-door. Of her life during the daytime, however, I knew little but what I gathered from her own account at night; for, as soon as the hours of business commenced, I saw that my absence would be acceptable; and, in general, therefore, I went off and sat in the parks or elsewhere until the approach of twilight.

But who, and what, meantime, was the master of the house himself? Reader, he was one of those anomalous practitioners in lower departments of the law who, on prudential reasons, or from necessity, deny themselves all indulgence in the luxury of too delicate a conscience. In many walks of life, a conscience is a more expensive encumbrance than a wife or a carriage; and, as people talk of "laying down" their carriages, so I suppose my friend Mr Brunell had "laid down" his conscience for a time; meaning, doubtless, to resume it as soon as he could afford it. He was an advertising attorney, who continually notified to the public, through the morning papers, that he undertook to raise loans for approved parties in what would generally be regarded as desperate cases—viz., where there was nothing better than *personal* security to offer. But,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

as he took good care to ascertain that there were ample funds in reversion to be counted on, or near connections that would not suffer the family name to be dishonoured, and as he insured the borrower's life over a sufficient period, the risk was not great ; and even of this the whole rested upon the actual money-lender, who stood aloof in the background, and never revealed himself to clients in his proper person, transacting all affairs through his proxies learned in the law—Mr Brunell or others. The inner economy of such a man's daily life would present a monstrous picture. Even with my limited opportunities for observing what went on, I saw scenes of intrigue and complex chicanery, at which I sometimes smile to this day, and at which I smiled then, in spite of my misery. My situation, however, at that time, gave me little experience, in my own person, of any qualities in Mr Brunell's character but such as did him honour ; and of his whole strange composition I ought to forget everything, but that towards me he was obliging, and, to the extent of his power, generous.

That power was not, indeed, very extensive. However, in common with the rats, I sat rent free ; and as Dr Johnson has recorded that he never but once in his life had as much wall-fruit as he wished, so let me be grateful that, on that single occasion, I had as large a choice of rooms, or even of apartments, in a London mansion—viz., as I am now at liberty to add, at the north-west corner of Greek Street, being the house on that side the street nearest to Soho Square—as I could possibly desire. Except the Bluebeard room, which the poor child believed to be permanently haunted, and which, besides, was locked, all others, from the attics to the cellars, were at our service. "The world was all before us," and we pitched our tent for the night in any spot we might fancy. This house I have described

THE STORMS OF LONDON

as roomy and respectable. It stands in a conspicuous situation, and in a well-known part of London. Many of my readers will have passed it, I doubt not, within a few hours of reading this. For myself, I never fail to visit it when accident draws me to London. About ten o'clock this very night (August 15, 1821, being my birthday), I turned aside from my evening walk along Oxford Street, in order to take a glance at it. It is now in the occupation of some family, apparently respectable. The windows are no longer coated by a paste, composed of ancient soot and superannuated rain; and the whole exterior no longer wears an aspect of gloom. By the lights in the front drawing-room, I observed a domestic party, assembled, perhaps, at tea, and apparently cheerful and gay—marvellous contrast, in my eyes, to the darkness, cold, silence, and desolation, of that same house nineteen years ago, when its nightly occupants were one famishing scholar and a poor, neglected child. Her, by-the-by, in after years, I vainly endeavoured to trace. Apart from her situation, she was not what would be called an interesting child. She was neither pretty, nor quick in understanding, nor remarkably pleasing in manners. But, thank God! even in those years I needed not the embellishments of elegant accessories to conciliate my affections. Plain human nature, in its humblest and most homely apparel, was enough for me; and I loved the child because she was my partner in wretchedness. If she is now living, she is probably a mother, with children of her own; but, as I have said, I could never trace her.

This I regret; but another person there was, at that time, whom I have since sought to trace with far deeper earnestness, and with far deeper sorrow at my failure. This person was a young woman, and one of that unhappy class who belong to the

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

outcasts and pariahs of our female population. I feel no shame, nor have any reason to feel it, in avowing that I was then on familiar and friendly terms with many women in that unfortunate condition. Smile not, reader too carelessly facile ! Frown not, reader too unseasonably austere ! Little call was there here either for smiles or frowns. A penniless schoolboy could not be supposed to stand within the range of such temptations ; besides that, according to the ancient Latin proverb, *sine Cerere et Baccho*, etc. These unhappy women, to me, were simply sisters in calamity ; and sisters amongst whom, in as large measure as amongst any other equal number of persons, commanding more of the world's respect, were to be found humanity, disinterested generosity, courage that would not falter in defence of the helpless, and fidelity that would have scorned to take bribes for betraying. But the truth is, that at no time of my life have I been a person to hold myself polluted by the touch or approach of any creature that wore a human shape. I cannot suppose, I will not believe, that any creatures wearing the form of man or woman are so absolutely rejected and reprobate outcasts, that merely to talk with them inflicts pollution. On the contrary, from my very earliest youth, it has been my pride to converse familiarly, *more Socratico*, with all human beings—man, woman, and child—that chance might fling in my way ; for a philosopher should not see with the eyes of the poor liminary creature calling himself a man of the world, filled with narrow and self-regarding prejudices of birth and education, but should look upon himself as a catholic creature, and as standing in an equal relation to high and low, to educated and uneducated, to the guilty and the innocent. Being myself, at that time, of necessity a peripatetic, or a walker of the streets, I naturally fell in more frequently with

THE STORMS OF LONDON

those peripatetics who are technically called street-walkers. Some of these women had occasionally taken my part against watchmen who wished to drive me off the steps of houses where I was sitting ; others had protected me against more serious aggressions. But one amongst them—the one on whose account I have at all introduced this subject—yet no ! let me not class thee, O noble-minded Ann —, with that order of women ; let me find, if it be possible, some gentler name to designate the condition of her to whose bounty and compassion—ministering to my necessities when all the world stood aloof from me—I owe it that I am at this time alive. For many weeks I had walked, at nights, with this poor, friendless girl up and down Oxford Street, or had rested with her on steps and under the shelter of porticos. She could not be so old as myself : she told me, indeed, that she had not completed her sixteenth year. By such questions as my interest about her prompted, I had gradually drawn forth her simple history. Hers was a case of ordinary occurrence (as I have since had reason to think), and one in which, if London beneficence had better adapted its arrangements to meet it, the power of the law might oftener be interposed to protect and to avenge. But the stream of London charity flows in a channel which, though deep and mighty, is yet noiseless and underground ;—not obvious or readily accessible to poor, houseless wanderers ; and it cannot be denied that the outside air and framework of society in London, as in all vast capitals, is unavoidably harsh, cruel, and repulsive. In any case, however, I saw that part of her injuries might have been redressed ; and I urged her often and earnestly to lay her complaint before a magistrate. Friendless as she was, I assured her that she would meet with immediate attention ; and that English justice, which was no

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

respector of persons, would speedily and amply avenge her on the brutal ruffian who had plundered her little property. She promised me often that she would ; but she delayed taking the steps I pointed out, from time to time ; for she was timid and dejected to a degree which showed how deeply sorrow had taken hold of her young heart ; and perhaps she thought justly that the most upright judge and the most righteous tribunals could do nothing to repair her heaviest wrongs. Something, however, would perhaps have been done ; for it had been settled between us at length (but, unhappily, on the very last time but one that I was ever to see her), that in a day or two I, accompanied by her, should state her case to a magistrate. This little service it was destined, however, that I should never realise. Meantime, that which she rendered to me, and which was greater than I could ever have repaid her, was this. One night, when we were pacing slowly along Oxford Street, and after a day when I had felt unusually ill and faint, I requested her to turn off with me into Soho Square. Thither we went ; and we sat down on the steps of a house, which to this hour I never pass without a pang of grief, and an inner act of homage to the spirit of that unhappy girl, in memory of the noble act which she there performed. Suddenly, as we sat, I grew much worse. I had been leaning my head against her bosom, and all at once I sank from her arms, and fell backwards on the steps. From the sensations I then had, I felt an inner conviction of the liveliest kind, that, without some powerful and reviving stimulus, I should either have died on the spot, or should, at least, have sunk to a point of exhaustion from which all re-ascent, under my friendless circumstances, would soon have become hopeless. Then it was, at this crisis of my fate, that my poor orphan companion, who had herself met

THE STORMS OF LONDON

with little but injuries in this world, stretched out a saving hand to me. Uttering a cry of terror, but without a moment's delay, she ran off into Oxford Street, and, in less time than could be imagined, returned to me with a glass of port-wine and spices, that acted upon my empty stomach (which at that time would have rejected all solid food) with an instantaneous power of restoration; and for this glass the generous girl, without a murmur, paid out of her own humble purse, at a time, be it remembered, when she had scarcely wherewithal to purchase the bare necessities of life, and when she could have no reason to expect that I should ever be able to reimburse her. O youthful benefactress! how often in succeeding years, standing in solitary places, and thinking of thee with grief of heart and perfect love—how often have I wished that, as in ancient times the curse of a father was believed to have a supernatural power, and to pursue its object with a fatal necessity of self-fulfilment, even so the benediction of a heart oppressed with gratitude might have a like prerogative; might have power given it from above to chase, to haunt, to waylay, to pursue thee into the central darkness of a London brothel, or (if it were possible) even into the darkness of the grave, there to awaken thee with an authentic message of peace and forgiveness, and of final reconciliation!

Some feelings, though not deeper or more passionate, are more tender than others; and often when I walk, at this time, in Oxford Street by dreamy lamp-light and hear those airs played on a common street-organ which years ago solaced me and my dear youthful companion, I shed tears, and muse with myself at the mysterious dispensation which so suddenly and so critically separated us for ever. How it happened, the reader will understand from what remains of this introductory narration.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Soon after the period of the last incident I have recorded, I met in Albemarle Street a gentleman of his late Majesty's household. This gentleman had received hospitalities, on different occasions, from my family; and he challenged me upon the strength of my family likeness. I did not attempt any disguise, but answered his questions ingenuously; and, on his pledging his word of honour that he would not betray me to my guardians, I gave him my real address in Greek Street. The next day I received from him a ten-pound bank-note. The letter enclosing it was delivered, with other letters of business, to the attorney; but, though his look and manner informed me that he suspected its contents, he gave it up to me honourably, and without demur.

This present, from the particular service to which much of it was applied, leads me naturally to speak again of the original purpose which had allured me up to London, and which I had been without intermission prosecuting through Mr Brunell from the first day of my arrival in London.

In so mighty a world as London, it will surprise my readers that I should not have found some means of staving off the last extremities of penury; and it will strike them that two resources, at least, must have been open to me: viz., either to seek assistance from the friends of my family, or to turn my youthful accomplishments, such as they were, into some channel of pecuniary emolument. As to the first course, I may observe, generally, that what I dreaded beyond all other evils was the chance of being reclaimed by my guardians; not doubting that whatever power the law gave them would have been enforced against me to the utmost; that is, to the extremity of forcibly restoring me to the school which I had quitted; a restoration which, as it would, in my eyes, have been a dis-

THE STORMS OF LONDON

honour, even if submitted to voluntarily, could not fail, when extorted from me in contempt and defiance of my own known wishes and earnest resistance, to have proved a humiliation worse to me than death, and which would, indeed, have terminated in death. I was, therefore, shy enough of applying for assistance even in those quarters where I was sure of receiving it, if at any risk of furnishing my guardians with a clue for tracing me. My father's friends, no doubt, had been many, and were scattered all over the kingdom; but, as to London in particular, though a large section of these friends would certainly be found there, yet (as full ten years had passed since his death) I knew very few of them even by name; and never having seen London before—except once, in my fifteenth year, for a few hours—I knew not the address of even those few. To this mode of gaining help, therefore, in part the difficulty, but much more the danger which I have mentioned, habitually indisposed me. In regard to the other mode—that of turning any talents or knowledge that I might possess to a lucrative use—I now feel half inclined to join my reader in wondering that I should have overlooked it. As a corrector of Greek proofs (if in no other way), I might surely have gained enough for my slender wants. Such an office as this I could have discharged with an exemplary and punctual accuracy that would soon have gained me the confidence of my employers. And there was this great preliminary advantage in giving such a direction to my efforts, that the intellectual dignity and elegance associated with all ministerial services about the press would have saved my pride and self-respect from mortification. In an extreme case, such as mine had now become, I should not have absolutely disdained the humble station of “devil.” A subaltern situation in a

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

service inherently honourable is better than a much higher situation in a service pointing to ultimate objects that are mean or ignoble. I am, indeed, not sure that I could adequately have discharged the functions of this office. To the perfection of the diabolic character I fear that patience is one of the indispensable graces; more, perhaps, than I should be found on trial to possess for dancing attendance upon crotchety authors, superstitiously fastidious in matters of punctuation. But why talk of my qualifications? Qualified or not, where could I obtain such an office? For it must not be forgotten that even a diabolic appointment requires interest. Towards *that*, I must first of all have an introduction to some respectable publisher; and this I had no means of obtaining. To say the truth, however, it had never once occurred to me to think of literary labours as a source of profit. No mode sufficiently speedy of obtaining money had ever suggested itself, but that of borrowing it on the strength of my future claims and expectations. This mode I sought by every avenue to compass; and amongst other persons I applied to a Jew named D—.

To this Jew, and to other advertising money-lenders, I had introduced myself, with an account of my expectations; which account they had little difficulty in ascertaining to be correct. The person there mentioned as the second son of —, was found to have all the claims (or more than all) that I had stated: but one question still remained, which the faces of the Jews pretty significantly suggested,—was I that person? This doubt had never occurred to me as a possible one; I had rather feared, whenever my Jewish friends scrutinised me keenly, that I might be too well known to be that person, and that some scheme might be passing in their minds for entrapping me and selling

THE STORMS OF LONDON

me to my guardians. It was strange to me to find my own self, *materialiter* considered (so I expressed it, for I doted on logical accuracy of distinctions), suspected of counterfeiting my own self, *formaliter* considered. However, to satisfy their scruples, I took the only course in my power. Whilst I was in Wales, I had received various letters from young friends; these I produced, for I carried them constantly in my pocket. Most of these letters were from the Earl of Altamont, who was at that time, and had been for some years back, amongst my confidential friends. These were dated from Eton. I had also some from the Marquis of Sligo, his father; who, though absorbed in agricultural pursuits, yet having been an Etonian himself, and as good a scholar as a nobleman needs to be, still retained an affection for classical studies and for youthful scholars. He had, accordingly, from the time that I was fifteen, corresponded with me—sometimes upon the great improvements which he had made, or was meditating, in the counties of Mayo and Sligo, since I had been there; sometimes upon the merits of a Latin poet; at other times, suggesting subjects on which he fancied that I could write verses myself, or breathe poetic inspiration into the mind of my once familiar companion, his son.

On reading the letters, one of my Jewish friends agreed to furnish two or three hundred pounds on my personal security, provided I could persuade the young earl—who was, by the way, not older than myself—to guarantee the payment on our joint coming of age; the Jew's final object being, as I now suppose, not the trifling profit he could expect to make by me, but the prospect of establishing a connection with my noble friend, whose great expectations were well known to him. In pursuance of this proposal on the part of the Jew,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

about eight or nine days after I had received the £10, I prepared to visit Eton. Nearly three guineas of the money I had given to my money-lending friend in the background; or, more accurately, I had given that sum to Mr Brunell, *alias* Brown, as representing Mr Dell, the Jew; and a smaller sum I had given directly to himself, on his own separate account. What he alleged in excuse for this draining my purse at so critical a moment was, that stamps must be bought, in order that the writings might be prepared whilst I was away from London. I thought in my heart that he was lying, but I did not wish to give him any excuse for charging his own delays upon me. About fifteen shillings I had employed in re-establishing (though in a very humble way) my dress. Of the remainder, I gave one-quarter (something more than a guinea) to Ann, meaning, on my return, to have divided with her whatever might remain. These arrangements made, soon after six o'clock, on a dark winter evening, I set off, accompanied by Ann, towards Piccadilly; for it was my intention to go down as far as the turn to Salt Hill and Slough on the Bath or Bristol mail. Our course lay through a part of the town which has now totally disappeared, so that I can no longer retrace its ancient boundaries—having been replaced by Regent Street and its adjacencies. *Swallow Street* is all that I remember of the names superseded by this large revolutionary usurpation. Having time enough before us, however, we bore away to the left, until we came into Golden Square. There, near the corner of Sherrard Street, we sat down, not wishing to part in the tumult and blaze of Piccadilly. I had told Ann of my plans some time before, and now I assured her again that she should share in my good fortune, if I met with any, and that I would never forsake her, as soon

THE STORMS OF LONDON

as I had power to protect her. This I fully intended, as much from inclination as from a sense of duty ; for, setting aside gratitude (which in any case must have made me her debtor for life), I loved her as affectionately as if she had been my sister ; and at this moment with sevenfold tenderness, from pity at witnessing her extreme dejection. I had apparently most reason for dejection, because I was leaving the saviour of my life ; yet I, considering the shock my health had received, was cheerful and full of hope. She, on the contrary, who was parting with one who had had little means of serving her, except by kindness and brotherly treatment, was overcome by sorrow, so that, when I kissed her at our final farewell, she put her arms about my neck, and wept, without speaking a word. I hoped to return in a week, at furthest, and I agreed with her, that on the fifth night from that, and every night afterwards, she should wait for me, at six o'clock, near the bottom of Great Titchfield Street ; which had formerly been our customary haven of rendezvous, to prevent our missing each other in the great Mediterranean of Oxford Street. Thus, and other measures of precaution, I took ; one, only, I forgot. She had either never told me, or (as a matter of no great interest) I had forgotten, her surname. It is a general practice, indeed, with girls of humble rank in her unhappy condition, not (as novel-reading women of higher pretensions) to style themselves *Miss Douglas*, *Miss Montague*, etc., but simply by their Christian names, *Mary*, *Jane*, *Frances*, etc. Her surname, as the surest means of tracing her, I ought now to have inquired ; but the truth is, having no reason to think that our meeting again could, in consequence of a short interruption, be more difficult or uncertain than it had been for so many weeks, I scarcely for a moment adverted to

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

it as necessary, or placed it amongst my memoranda against this parting interview; and my final anxieties being spent in comforting her with hopes, and in pressing upon her the necessity of getting 'some' medicine for a violent cough with which she was troubled, I wholly forgot this precaution until it was too late to recall her.

When I reached the Gloucester Coffee-house in Piccadilly, at which, in those days, all the western mails stopped for a few minutes in going out of London, it was already a quarter of an hour past eight o'clock; the Bristol Mail was on the point of going off, and I mounted on the outside. The fine fluent motion of this mail soon laid me asleep. It is somewhat remarkable that the first easy or refreshing sleep which I had enjoyed for some months was on the outside of a mail-coach—a bed which, at this day, I find rather an uneasy one. Connected with this sleep was a little incident which served, as hundreds of others did at that time, to convince me how easily a man, who has never been in any great distress, may pass through life without knowing in his own person, and experimentally testing, the possible goodness of the human heart, or, as unwillingly I add, its possible churlishness. So thick a curtain of *manners* is drawn over the features and expression of men's natures, that, to the ordinary observer, the two extremities, and the infinite field of varieties which lie between them, are all confounded under one neutral disguise. The case was this. For the first four or five miles out of London, I annoyed my fellow-passenger on the roof by occasionally falling against him when the coach gave a lurch; and, indeed, if the road had been less smooth and level than it was, I should have fallen off from weakness. Of this annoyance he complained heavily; as, perhaps, in the same circumstances,

THE STORMS OF LONDON

most people would. He expressed his complaint, however, more morosely than the occasion seemed to warrant; and if I had parted with him at that moment, I should have thought of him as a surly and almost brutal fellow. Still I was conscious that I had given him some cause for complaint; and therefore I apologised, assuring him that I would do what I could to avoid falling asleep for the future; and, at the same time, in as few words as possible, I explained to him that I was ill, and in a weak state from long suffering, and that I could not afford to take an inside place. The man's manner changed upon hearing this explanation in an instant: and when I next woke for a minute, from the noise and lights of Hounslow (for, in spite of my efforts, I had again fallen asleep within two minutes), I found that he had put his arm round me to protect me from falling off; and for the rest of my journey he behaved to me with the gentleness of a woman. And this was the more kind, as he could not have known that I was not going the whole way to Bath or Bristol. Unfortunately, indeed, I *did* go further than I intended; for so genial and refreshing was my sleep, being in the open air, that, upon the sudden pulling up of the mail (possibly at a post-office), I found that we had reached some place six or seven miles to the west of Salt Hill. Here I alighted; and, during the half-minute that the mail stopped, I was entreated by my friendly companion (who, from the transient glimpse I had of him under the glaring lights of Piccadilly, might be a respectable upper servant) to go to bed without delay. Thus, under the feeling that some consideration was due to one who had done me so seasonable a service, I promised, though with no intention of doing so; and, in fact, I immediately moved forward on foot. It must then have been nearly eleven; but so slowly did

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

I creep along that I heard a clock in a cottage strike four as I was on the point of turning down the road from Slough to Eton. The air and the sleep had both refreshed me ; but I was weary, nevertheless. I remember a thought (obvious enough, and pointedly expressed by a Roman poet) which gave me some consolation, at that moment, under my poverty. There had been, some weeks before, a murder committed on Hounslow Heath, which at that time was really a heath, entirely unenclosed, and exhibiting a sea-like expanse in all directions, except one. I cannot be mistaken when I say that the name of the murdered person was *Steele*, and that he was the owner of a lavender plantation in that neighbourhood. Every step of my regress (for I now walked with my face towards London) was bringing me nearer to the heath ; and it naturally occurred to me, that I and the accursed murderer, if he were that night abroad, might, at every instant, be unconsciously approaching each other through the darkness ; in which case, said I, supposing myself—instead of being little better than an outcast,

Lord of my learning, and no land beside—

like my friend Lord Altamont, heir, by general repute, to £30,000 per annum, what a panic should I be under at this moment about my throat ! Indeed, it was not likely that Lord Altamont should ever be in my situation ; but, nevertheless, the spirit of the remark remains true, that vast power and possessions make a man shamefully afraid of dying ; and I am convinced that many of the most intrepid adventurers, who, being poor, enjoy the full use of their natural energies, would, if at the very instant of going into action news were brought to them that they had unexpectedly succeeded to an estate in England of £50,000 a-year, feel their

THE STORMS OF LONDON

dislike to bullets furiously sharpened, and their efforts at self-possession proportionably difficult. So true it is, in the language of a wise man, whose own experience had made him acquainted equally with good and evil fortune, that riches are better fitted

To slacken virtue, and abate her edge,
Than tempt her to do aught may merit praise.
Paradise Regained.

I dally with my subject, because, to myself, the remembrance of these times is profoundly interesting. But my reader shall not have any further cause to complain; for now I hasten to its close. In the road between Slough and Eton I fell asleep; and, just as the morning began to dawn, I was awakened by the voice of a man standing over me, and apparently studying my *physics*, whilst to me—upon so sudden an introduction to him in so suspicious a situation—his *morals* naturally suggested a more interesting subject of inquiry. I know not what he was. He was an ill-looking fellow, but not, therefore, of necessity, an ill-meaning fellow; or, if he were, I suppose he thought that no person sleeping out-of-doors in winter could be worth robbing. In which conclusion, however, as it regarded myself, I have the honour to assure him, supposing him ever to find himself amongst my readers, that he was entirely mistaken. I was not sorry at his disturbance, as it roused me to pass through Eton before people were generally astir. The night had been heavy and misty, but towards the morning it had changed to a slight frost, and the trees were now covered with rime. I slipped through Eton unobserved; washed myself, and as far as possible adjusted my dress, at a little public-house in Windsor; and, about eight o'clock, went down towards the precincts of the college, near which were congregated

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the houses of the "Dames." On my road I met some junior boys, of whom I made inquiries. An Etonian is always a gentleman; and, in spite of my shabby habiliments, they answered me civilly. My friend Lord Altamont was gone to Jesus College, Cambridge. *Ibi omnis effusus labor!* I had, however, other friends at Eton; but it is not to all who wear that name in prosperity that a man is willing to present himself in distress. On recollecting myself, however, I asked for the Earl of Desert, to whom (though my acquaintance with him was not so intimate as with some others) I should not have shrunk from presenting myself under any circumstances. He was still at Eton, though, I believe, on the wing for Cambridge. I called, was received kindly, and asked to breakfast.

Lord Desert placed before me a magnificent breakfast. It was really such; but in my eyes it seemed trebly magnificent from being the first regular meal, the first "good man's table," that I had sat down to for months. Strange to say, I could scarcely eat anything. On the day when I first received my ten-pound bank-note, I had gone to a baker's shop and bought a couple of rolls; this very shop I had some weeks before surveyed with an eagerness of desire which it was humiliating to recollect. I remembered the story (which, however, I now believed to be a falsehood) about Otway; and feared that there might be danger in eating too rapidly. But there was no cause for alarm; my appetite was utterly gone, and I nauseated food of every kind. This effect, from eating what approached to a meal, I continued to feel for weeks. On the present occasion, at Lord Desert's table, I found myself not at all better than usual; and, in the midst of luxuries, appetite I had none. I had, however, unfortunately, at all times a craving for wine: I explained my situation,

THE STORMS OF LONDON

therefore, to Lord Desert, and gave him a short account of my late sufferings; with which he expressed deep sympathy, and called for wine. This gave me instantaneous relief and immoderate pleasure; and on all occasions, when I had an opportunity, I never failed to drink wine. Obvious it is, however, that this indulgence in wine would continue to strengthen my malady, for the tone of my stomach was apparently quite sunk; but, by a better regimen, it might sooner, and, perhaps, effectually, have been restored. I hope that it was not from this love of wine that I lingered in the neighbourhood of my Eton friends; I persuaded myself *then*, that it was from reluctance to ask Lord Desert, on whom I was conscious of having no sufficient claims, the particular service in quest of which I had come to Eton. I was, however, unwilling to lose my journey, and—I asked it. Lord Desert, whose good-nature was unbounded, and which, in regard to myself, had been measured rather by his compassion, perhaps, for my condition, and his knowledge of my intimacy with several of his relatives, than by an over-rigorous inquiry into the extent of my own direct claims, faltered, nevertheless, at this request. He acknowledged that he did not like to have any dealings with money-lenders, and feared lest such a transaction might come to the ears of his connections. Moreover, he doubted whether *his* signature, whose expectations were so much more bounded than those of his cousin, would avail with my unchristian friends. Still he did not wish, apparently, to mortify me by a refusal peremptory and absolute; for, after a little consideration, he promised, under certain conditions, which he pointed out, to give his security. Lord Desert was at this time not above eighteen years of age; but I have often doubted, on recollecting, since, the good sense and

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

prudence which on this occasion he mingled with so much urbanity of manner (which in him wore the grace of youthful sincerity), whether any statesman—the oldest and the most accomplished in diplomacy—could have acquitted himself better under the same circumstances.

Re-comforted by this promise, which was not quite equal to the best, but far above the worst that I had anticipated, I returned in a Windsor coach to London three days after I had quitted it. And now I come to the end of my story. The Jews did not approve of Lord Desert's conditions, or so they said; whether they would in the end have acceded to them, and were only seeking time for making further inquiries, I know not; but many delays were made—time passed on—the small fragment of my bank-note had just melted away, and before any conclusion could have been put to the business, I must have relapsed into my former state of wretchedness. Suddenly, at this crisis, an opening was made, almost by accident, for reconciliation with my guardians. I quitted London in haste, and returned to the Priory; after some time, I proceeded to Oxford; and it was not until many months had passed away that I had it in my power again to revisit the ground which had become so interesting to me and to this day remains so, as the chief scene of my youthful sufferings.

Meantime, what had become of Ann? Where was she? Whither had she gone? According to our agreement, I sought her daily, and waited for her every night, so long as I staid in London, at the corner of Titchfield Street; and during the last days of my stay in London I put into activity every means of tracing her that my knowledge of London suggested, and the limited extent of my power made possible. The street where she had

THE STORMS OF LONDON

lodged I knew, but not the house; and I remembered, at last, some account which she had given of ill-treatment from her landlord, which made it probable that she had quitted those lodgings, before we parted. She had few acquaintance; most people, besides, thought that the earnestness of my inquiries arose from motives which moved their laughter or their slight regard; and others, thinking that I was in chase of a girl who had robbed me of some trifles, were naturally and excusably indisposed to give me any clue to her, if indeed they had any to give. Finally, as my despairing resource, on the day I left London I put into the hands of the only person who (I was sure) must know Ann by sight, from having been in company with us once or twice, an address to the Priory. All was in vain. To this hour I have never heard a syllable about her. This, amongst such troubles as most men meet with in this life, has been my heaviest affliction. If she lived, doubtless we must have been sometimes in search of each other, at the very same moment, through the mighty labyrinths of London; perhaps even within a few feet of each other—a barrier no wider, in a London street, often amounting in the end to a separation for eternity! During some years I hoped that she *did* live; and I suppose that, in the literal and unrhetoical use of the word *myriad*, I must, on my different visits to London, have looked into many myriads of female faces, in the hope of meeting Ann. I should know her again amongst a thousand, and if seen but for a moment. Handsome she was not; but she had a sweet expression of countenance, and a peculiarly graceful carriage of the head. I sought her, I have said, in hope. So it was for years; but now I should fear to see her; and her cough, which grieved me when I parted with her, is now my consolation. Now I

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

wish to see her no longer, but think of her, more gladly, as one long since laid in the grave—in the grave, I would hope, of a Magdalen; taken away before injuries and cruelty had blotted out and transfigured her ingenuous nature, or the brutalities of ruffians had completed the ruin they had begun.

So then, Oxford Street, stony-hearted step-mother, thou that listenest to the sighs of orphans, and drinkest the tears of children, at length I was dismissed from thee! The time was come that I no more should pace in anguish thy never-ending terraces; no more should wake and dream in captivity to the pangs of hunger. Successors too many to myself and Ann have, doubtless, since then trodden in our footsteps, inheritors of our calamities. Other orphans than Ann have sighed; tears have been shed by other children; and thou, Oxford Street, hast since those days echoed to the groans of innumerable hearts. For myself, however, the storm which I had outlived seemed to have been the pledge of a long fair weather; the premature sufferings which I had paid down, to have been accepted as a ransom for many years to come, as a price of long immunity from sorrow; and if again I walked in London, a solitary and contemplative man (as oftentimes I did), I walked for the most part in serenity and peace of mind. And, although it is true that the calamities of my novitiate in London had struck root so deeply in my bodily constitution, that afterwards they shot up and flourished afresh, and grew into a noxious umbrage that has over-shadowed and darkened my latter years, yet these second assaults of suffering were met with a fortitude more confirmed, with the resources of a maturer intellect, and with alleviations, how deep! from sympathising affection.

Thus, however, with whatsoever alleviations,

THE STORMS OF LONDON

years far asunder were bound together by subtle links of suffering derived from a common root. And herein I notice the short-sightedness of human desires—that oftentimes, on moonlight nights, during my first mournful abode in London, my consolation was (if such it could be thought) to gaze from Oxford Street up every avenue in succession which pierces northward through the heart of Marylebone to the fields and the woods; for *that*, said I, travelling with my eyes up the long vistas which lay part in light and part in shade—“*that* is the road to the north, and, therefore, to Grasmere” (upon which, though as yet unknown to me, I had a presentiment that I should fix my choice for a residence); “and if I had the wings of a dove, *that* way I would fly for rest.” Thus I said, and thus I wished in my blindness; yet, even in that very northern region it was, in that very valley to which my erroneous wishes pointed, that this second birth of my sufferings began, and that they again threatened to besiege the citadel of life and hope. There it was that for years I was persecuted by visions as ugly, and by phantoms as ghastly, as ever haunted the couch of Orestes; and in this unhappier than he—that sleep, which comes to all as a respite and a restoration, and to him especially as a blessed balm for his wounded heart and his haunted brain, visited me as my bitterest scourge. Thus blind was I in my desires. And yet, if a veil interposes between the dim-sightedness of man and his future calamities, the same veil hides from him their alleviations; and a grief which had not been feared, is met by consolations which had not been hoped. I, therefore, who participated, as it were, in the troubles of Orestes (excepting only in his agitated conscience), participated no less in all his supports; my Eumenides, like his, were at my bed-feet, and stared in upon

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

me through the curtains ; but, watching by my pillow, or defrauding herself of sleep to bear me company through the heavy watches of the night, sat my Electra ; for thou, beloved M——, dear companion of my later years, thou wast my Electra ! and neither in nobility of mind nor in long-suffering affection wouldst permit that a Grecian sister should excel an English wife. For thou thoughtest not much to stoop to humble offices of kindness, and to servile ministrations of tenderest affection ; to wipe away for years the unwholesome dew upon the forehead, or to refresh the lips when parched and baked with fever ; nor even when thy own peaceful slumbers had by long sympathy become infected with the spectacle of my dread contest with phantoms and shadowy enemies, that oftentimes bade me “ sleep no more ! ”—not even then didst thou utter a complaint or any murmur, nor withdraw thy angelic smiles, nor shrink from thy service of love, more than Electra did of old. For she, too, though she was a Grecian woman, and the daughter of the king of men, yet wept sometimes, and hid her face in her robe.

But these troubles are past, and thou wilt read these records of a period so dolorous to us both as the legend of some hideous dream that can return no more. Meantime I am again in London ; and again I pace the terraces of Oxford Street by night ; and oftentimes—when I am oppressed by anxieties that demand all my philosophy and the comfort of thy presence to support, and yet remember that I am separated from thee by three hundred miles and the length of three dreary months—I look up the streets that run northward from Oxford Street, upon moonlight nights, and recollect my youthful ejaculation of anguish ; but then, remembering that thou art sitting alone in that same valley, and mistress of that very house to which my heart

THE STORMS OF LONDON

turned in its blindness nineteen years ago, I think that, though blind indeed, and scattered to the winds of late, the promptings of my heart may yet have had reference to a remoter time, and may be justified if read in another meaning ; and if I could allow myself to descend again to the important wishes of childhood, I should again say to myself, as I look to the north, " Oh, that I had the wings of a dove ! " and with how just a confidence in thy good and gracious nature might I add the other half of my early ejaculation—" and *that* way I would fly for comfort ! "

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

The English Mail-coach

Section I

THE GLORY OF MOTION

SOME twenty or more years before I matriculated at Oxford, Mr Palmer, at that time M.P. for Bath, had accomplished two things, very hard to do on our little planet, the Earth, however cheap they may be held by eccentric people in comets—he had invented mail-coaches, and he had married the daughter of a duke. He was, therefore, just twice as great a man as Galileo, who did certainly invent (or, which is the same thing, discover) the satellites of Jupiter, those very next things extant to mail-coaches in the two capital pretensions of speed and keeping time, but, on the other hand, who did *not* marry the daughter of a duke.

These mail-coaches, as organised by Mr Palmer, are entitled to a circumstantial notice from myself, having had so large a share in developing the anarchies of my subsequent dreams; an agency which they accomplished, first, through velocity, at that time unprecedented—for they first revealed the glory of motion; secondly, through grand effects for the eye between lamp-light and the darkness upon solitary roads; thirdly, through animal beauty and power so often displayed in the class of horses selected for this mail service; fourthly, through the conscious presence of a central intellect, that, in the midst of vast distances—of storms, of darkness, of danger—over-ruled all obstacles into one steady co-operation to a national result. For my own feeling, this post-office service spoke as by some mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and so far in

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *bâton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony like that of heart, brain, and lungs, in a healthy animal organisation. But, finally, that particular element in this whole combination which most impressed myself, and through which it is that to this hour Mr Palmer's mail-coach system tyrannises over my dreams by terror and terrific beauty, lay in the awful *political* mission which at that time it fulfilled. The mail-coach it was that distributed over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials, the heart-shaking news of Trafalgar, of Salamanca, of Vittoria, of Waterloo. These were the harvests that, in the grandeur of their reaping, redeemed the tears and blood in which they had been sown. Neither was the meanest peasant so much below the grandeur and the sorrow of the times as to confound battles such as these, which were gradually moulding the destinies of Christendom, with the vulgar conflicts of ordinary warfare, so often no more than gladiatorial trials of national prowess. The victories of England in this stupendous contest rose of themselves as natural *Te Deums* to heaven; and it was felt by the thoughtful that such victories, at such a crisis of general prostration, were not more beneficial to ourselves than finally to France, our enemy, and to the nations of all western or central Europe, through whose pusillanimity it was that the French domination had prospered.

The mail-coach, as the national organ for publishing these mighty events thus diffusively influential, became itself a spiritualised and glorified object to an impassioned heart; and naturally, in the Oxford of that day, *all* hearts were impassioned, as being all (or nearly all) in *early* manhood. In most universities there is one single college; in Oxford there were five-and-twenty, all of which

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

were peopled by young men, the *élite* of their own generation; not boys, but men; none under eighteen. In some of these many colleges, the custom permitted the student to keep what are called "short terms"; that is, the four terms of Michaelmas, Lent, Easter, and Act, were kept by a residence, in the aggregate, of ninety-one days, or thirteen weeks. Under this interrupted residence, it was possible that a student might have a reason for going down to his home four times in the year. This made eight journeys to and fro. But, as these homes lay dispersed through all the shires of the island, and most of us disdained all coaches except his majesty's mail, no city out of London could pretend to so extensive a connection with Mr Palmer's establishment as Oxford. Three mails, at the least, I remember as passing every day through Oxford, and benefiting by my personal patronage—viz., the Worcester, the Gloucester, and the Holyhead mail. Naturally, therefore, it became a point of some interest with us, whose journeys revolved every six weeks on an average, to look a little into the executive details of the system. With some of these Mr Palmer had no concern; they rested upon bye-laws enacted by posting-houses for their own benefit, and upon other bye-laws, equally stern, enacted by the inside passengers for the illustration of their own haughty exclusiveness. These last were of a nature to rouse our scorn, from which the transition was not very long to systematic mutiny. Up to this time, say 1804, or 1805 (the year of Trafalgar), it had been the fixed assumption of the four inside people (as an old tradition of all public carriages derived from the reign of Charles II), that they, the illustrious quaternion, constituted a porcelain variety of the human race, whose dignity would have been compromised by exchanging one word of civility with the three

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

miserable delf-ware outsiders. Even to have kicked an outsider, might have been held to attain the foot concerned in that operation ; so that, perhaps, it would have required an act of Parliament to restore its purity of blood. What words, then, could express the horror, and the sense of treason, in that case, which *had* happened, where all three outsiders (the trinity of Pariahs) made a vain attempt to sit down at the same breakfast-table or dinner-table with the consecrated four? I myself witnessed such an attempt ; and on that occasion a benevolent old gentleman endeavoured to soothe his three holy associates, by suggesting that, if the outsiders were indicted for this criminal attempt at the next assizes, the court would regard it as a case of lunacy, or *delirium tremens*, rather than of treason. England owes much of her grandeur to the depth of the aristocratic element in her social composition, when pulling against her strong democracy. I am not the man to laugh at it. But sometimes, undoubtedly, it expressed itself in comic shapes. The course taken with the infatuated outsiders, in the particular attempt which I have noticed, was, that the waiter, beckoning them away from the privileged *salle-à-manger*, sang out, " This way, my good men," and then enticed these good men away to the kitchen. But that plan had not always answered. Sometimes, though rarely, cases occurred where the intruders, being stronger than usual, or more vicious than usual, resolutely refused to budge, and so far carried their point, as to have a separate table arranged for themselves in a corner of the general room. Yet, if an Indian screen could be found ample enough to plant them out from the very eyes of the high table, or *dais*, it then became possible to assume as a fiction of law—that the three delf fellows, after all, were not present. They could be ignored by the porcelain men, under the

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

maxim, that objects not appearing, and not existing, are governed by the same logical construction.

Such being, at that time, the usages of mail-coaches, what was to be done by us of young Oxford? We, the most aristocratic of people, who were addicted to the practice of looking down superciliously even upon the insides themselves as often very questionable characters—were we, by voluntarily going outside, to court indignities? If our dress and bearing sheltered us, generally, from the suspicion of being “raff” (the name at that period for “snobs”) we really *were* such constructively, by the place we assumed. If we did not submit to the deep shadow of eclipse, we entered at least the skirts of its penumbra. And the analogy of theatres was valid against us, where no man can complain of the annoyances incident to the pit or gallery, having his instant remedy in paying the higher price of the boxes. But the soundness of this analogy we disputed. In the case of the theatre, it cannot be pretended that the inferior situations have any separate attractions, unless the pit may be supposed to have an advantage for the purposes of the critic or the dramatic reporter. But the critic or reporter is a rarity. For most people, the sole benefit is in the price. Now, on the contrary, the outside of the mail had its own incommunicable advantages. These we could not forgo. The higher price we would willingly have paid, but not the price connected with the condition of riding inside; which condition we pronounced insufferable. The air, the freedom of prospect, the proximity to the horses, the elevation of seat—these were what we required; but, above all, the certain anticipation of purchasing occasional opportunities of driving.

Such was the difficulty which pressed us; and under the coercion of this difficulty, we instituted

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

a searching inquiry into the true quality and valuation of the different apartments about the mail. We conducted this inquiry on metaphysical principles ; and it was ascertained satisfactorily, that the roof of the coach, which by some weak men had been called the attics, and by some the garrets, was in reality the drawing-room ; in which drawing-room the box was the chief ottoman or sofa ; whilst it appeared that the *inside*, which had been traditionally regarded as the only room tenantable by gentlemen, was, in fact, the coal-cellar in disguise.

Great wits jump. The very same idea had not long before struck the celestial intellect of China. Amongst the presents carried out by our first embassy to that country was a state-coach. It had been specially selected as a personal gift by George III ; but the exact mode of using it was an intense mystery to Peking. The ambassador, indeed (Lord Macartney), had made some imperfect explanations upon this point ; but, as his excellency communicated these in a diplomatic whisper, at the very moment of his departure, the celestial intellect was very feebly illuminated, and it became necessary to call a cabinet council on the grand state question, "Where was the Emperor to sit ?" The hammer-cloth happened to be unusually gorgeous ; and partly, ~~on~~ that consideration, but partly also because the box offered the most elevated seat, was nearest to the moon, and undeniably went foremost, it was resolved by acclamation that the box was the imperial throne, and for the scoundrel who drove, he might sit where he could find a perch. The horses, therefore, being harnessed, solemnly his imperial majesty ascended his new English throne under a flourish of trumpets, having the first lord of the treasury on his right hand, and the chief jester on his left. Peking gloried in the spectacle ; and

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

in the whole flowery people, constructively present by representation, there was but one discontented person, and *that* was the coachman. This mutinous individual audaciously shouted, "Where am I to sit?" But the privy council, incensed by his disloyalty, unanimously opened the door and kicked him into the inside. He had all the inside places to himself; but such is the rapacity of ambition, that he was still dissatisfied. "I say," he cried out in an extempore petition, addressed to the emperor through the window—"I say, how am I to catch hold of the reins?"—"Anyhow," was the imperial answer; "don't trouble *me*, man, in my glory. How catch the reins? Why, through the windows, through the keyholes—*anyhow*." Finally this contumacious coachman lengthened the check-strings into a sort of jury-reins, communicating with the horses; with these he drove as steadily as Pekin had any right to expect. The emperor returned after the briefest of circuits; he descended in great pomp from his throne, with the severest resolution never to remount it. A public thanksgiving was ordered for his majesty's happy escape from the disease of broken neck; and the state-coach was dedicated thenceforward as a votive offering to the god Fo, Fo—whom the learned more accurately called Fi, Fi.

A revolution of this same Chinese character did young Oxford of that era effect in the constitution of mail-coach society. It was a perfect French revolution; and we had good reason to say, *ça ira*. In fact, it soon became *too* popular. The "public"—a well-known character, particularly disagreeable, though slightly respectable, and notorious for affecting the chief seats in synagogues—had at first loudly opposed this revolution; but when the opposition showed itself to be ineffectual, our disagreeable friend went into it with headlong zeal. At first it was a sort of race between us; and, as

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the public is usually from thirty to fifty years old, naturally we of young Oxford, that averaged about twenty, had the advantage. Then the public took to bribing, giving fees to horse-keepers, etc., who hired out their persons as warming-pans on the box-seat. *That*, you know, was shocking to all moral sensibilities. Come to bribery, said we, and there is an end to all morality, Aristotle's, Zeno's, Cicero's, or anybody's. And, besides, of what use was it? For *we* bribed also. And as our bribes to those of the public were as five shillings to sixpence, here again young Oxford had the advantage. But the contest was ruinous to the principles of the stables connected with the mails. This whole corporation was constantly bribed, rebribed, and often sur-rebribed; a mail-coach yard was like the hustings in a contested election; and a horse-keeper, ostler, or helper, was held by the philosophical at that time to be the most corrupt character in the nation.

There was an impression upon the public mind, natural enough from the continually augmenting velocity of the mail, but quite erroneous, that an outside seat on this class of carriages was a post of danger. On the contrary, I maintained that, if a man had become nervous from some gipsy prediction in his childhood, allocating to a particular moon now approaching some unknown danger, and he should inquire earnestly, "Whither can I fly for shelter? Is a prison the safest retreat? or a lunatic hospital? or the British Museum?" I should have replied, "Oh, no; I'll tell you what to do. Take lodgings for the next forty days on the box of his Majesty's mail. Nobody can touch you there. If it is by bills at ninety days after date that you are made unhappy—if noters and protesters are the sort of wretches whose astrological shadows darken the house of life—then note you what I

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

vehemently protest—viz., that no matter though the sheriff and under-sheriff in every county should be running after you with his *posse*, touch a hair of your head he cannot whilst you keep house, and have your legal domicile on the box of the mail. It is felony to stop the mail; even the sheriff cannot do that. And an *extra* touch of the whip to the leaders (no great matter if it grazes the sheriff) at any time guarantees your safety.” In fact, a bedroom in a quiet house seems a safe enough retreat, yet it is liable to its own notorious nuisances—to robbers by night, to rats, to fire. But the mail laughs at these terrors. To robbers, the answer is packed up and ready for delivery in the barrel of the guard’s blunderbuss. Rats again!—there *are* none about mail-coaches, any more than snakes in Von Trol’s Iceland; except, indeed, now and then a parliamentary rat, who always hides his shame in what I have shown to be the “coal-cellar.” And as to fire, I never knew but one in a mail-coach, which was in the Exeter mail, and caused by an obstinate sailor bound to Devonport. Jack, making light of the law and the law-giver that had set their faces against his offence, insisted on taking up a forbidden seat in the rear of the roof, from which he could exchange his own yarns with those of the guard. No greater offence was then known to mail-coaches; it was treason, it was *lesa majestas*, it was by tendency arson; and the ashes of Jack’s pipe, falling amongst the straw of the hinder boot containing the mail-bags, raised a flame which (aided by the wind of our motion) threatened a revolution in the republic of letters. Yet even this left the sanctity of the box unviolated. In dignified repose, the coachman and myself sat on, resting with benign composure upon our knowledge that the fire would have to burn its way through four inside passengers before it could reach ourselves. I re-

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

marked to the coachman, with a quotation from Virgil's *Æneid* really too hackneyed—

*Jam proximus ardet
Ucalegon.*

But, recollecting that the Virgilian part of the coachman's education might have been neglected, I interpreted so far as to say, that perhaps at that moment the flames were catching hold of our worthy brother and inside passenger, Ucalegon. The coachman made no answer, which is my own way when a stranger addresses me either in Syriac or in Coptic, but by his faint sceptical smile he seemed to insinuate that he knew better; for that Ucalegon, as it happened, was not in the way-bill, and therefore could not have been booked.

No dignity is perfect which does not at some point ally itself with the mysterious. The connection of the mail with the state and the executive government—a connection obvious, but yet not strictly defined—gave to the whole mail establishment an official grandeur which did us service on the roads, and invested us with seasonable terrors. Not the less impressive were those terrors, because their legal limits were imperfectly ascertained. Look at those turnpike gates; with what deferential hurry, with what an obedient start, they fly open at our approach! Look at that long line of carts and carters ahead, audaciously usurping the very crest of the road. Ah! traitors, they do not hear us as yet; but, as soon as the dreadful blast of our horn reaches them with proclamation of our approach, see with what frenzy of trepidation they fly to their horses' heads, and deprecate our wrath by the precipitation of their crane-neck quarterings. Treason they feel to be their crime; each individual carter feels himself under the ban of confiscation and attainder; his blood is attainted through six

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

generations ; and nothing is wanting but the headsmen and his axe, the block and the sawdust, to close up the vista of his horrors. What ! shall it be within benefit of clergy to delay the king's message on the high road ?—to interrupt the great respirations, ebb and flood, *systole* and *diastole*, of the national intercourse ?—to endanger the safety of tidings, running day and night between all nations and languages ? Or can it be fancied, amongst the weakest of men, that the bodies of the criminals will be given up to their widows for Christian burial ? Now the doubts which were raised as to our powers did more to wrap them in terror, by wrapping them in uncertainty, than could have been effected by the sharpest definitions of the law from the Quarter Sessions. We, on our parts (we, the collective mail, I mean), did our utmost to exalt the idea of our privileges by the insolence with which we wielded them. Whether this insolence rested upon law that gave it a sanction, or upon conscious power that haughtily dispensed with that sanction, equally it spoke from a potential station and the agent, in each particular insolence of the moment, was viewed reverentially as one having authority.

Sometimes after breakfast his Majesty's mail would become frisky ; and in its difficult wheelings amongst the intricacies of early markets, it would upset an apple-cart, a cart loaded with eggs, etc. Huge was the affliction and dismay, awful was the smash. I, as far as possible, endeavoured in such a case to represent the conscience and moral sensibilities of the mail ; and, when wildernesses of eggs were lying poached under our horses' hoofs, then would I stretch forth my hands in sorrow, saying (in words too celebrated at that time, from the false echoes of Marengo), " Ah ! wherefore have we not time to weep over you ? " which was evidently

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

impossible, since, in fact, we had not time to laugh over them. Tied to post-office allowance, in some cases of fifty minutes for eleven miles, could the royal mail pretend to undertake the offices of sympathy and condolence? Could it be expected to provide tears for the accidents of the road? If even it seemed to trample on humanity, it did so, I felt, in discharge of its own more peremptory duties.

Upholding the morality of the mail, *à fortiori* I upheld its rights; as a matter of duty, I stretched to the uttermost its privilege of imperial precedency, and astonished weak minds by the feudal powers which I hinted to be lurking constructively in the charters of this proud establishment. Once I remember being on the box of the Holyhead mail, between Shrewsbury and Oswestry, when a tawdry thing from Birmingham, some "Tallyho" or "Highflyer," all flaunting with green and gold, came up alongside of us. What a contrast to our royal simplicity of form and colour in this plebeian wretch! The single ornament on our dark ground of chocolate colour was the mighty shield of the imperial arms, but emblazoned in proportions as modest as a signet-ring bears to a seal of office. Even this was displayed only on a single pannel, whispering, rather than proclaiming, our relations to the mighty state; whilst the beast from Birmingham, our green-and-gold friend from false, fleeting, perjured Brummagem, had as much writing and painting on its sprawling flanks as would have puzzled a decipherer from the tombs of Luxor. For some time this Birmingham machine ran along by our side—a piece of familiarity that already of itself seemed to me sufficiently-jacobinical. But all at once a movement of the horses announced a desperate intention of leaving us behind. "Do you see *that*?" I said to the coachman.—"I see," was his short answer. He was wide awake, yet he

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

wasted longer than seemed prudent; for the horses of our audacious opponent had a disagreeable air of freshness and power. But his motive was loyal; his wish was, that the Birmingham conceit should be full-blown before he froze it. When *that* seemed right, he unloosed, or, to speak by a stronger word, he *sprang*, his known resources: he slipped our royal horses like cheetahs, or hunting-leopards, after the affrighted game. How they could retain such a reserve of fiery power after the work they had accomplished, seemed hard to explain. But on our side, besides the physical superiority, was a tower of moral strength, namely, the king's name, "which they upon the adverse faction wanted." Passing them without an effort, as it seemed, we threw them into the rear with so lengthening an interval between us, as proved in itself the bitterest mockery of their presumption; whilst our guard blew back a shattering blast of triumph, that was really too painfully full of derision.

I mention this little incident for its connection with what followed. A Welsh rustic, sitting behind me, asked if I had not felt my heart burn within me during the progress of the race? I said, with philosophical calmness, *No*; because we were not racing with a nail, so that no glory could be gained. In fact, it was sufficiently mortifying that such a Birmingham ting should dare to challenge us. The Welshman replied, that he didn't see *that*; for that a cat might look at a king, and a Brummagem coach might lawfully race the Holyhead mail. "*Race* us, if you like," I replied, "though even *that* has an air of sedition, but not *beat* us. This would have been treason; and for its own sake I am glad that the 'Tallyho' was disappointed." So dissatisfied did the Welshman seem with this opinion, that at last I was obliged to tell him a very fine story from one of our elder dramatists—viz., that

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

once, in some far oriental kingdom, when the sultan of all the land, with his princes, ladies, and chief omrahs, were flying their falcons, a hawk suddenly flew at a majestic eagle; and in defiance of the eagle's natural advantages, in contempt also of the eagle's traditional royalty, and before the whole assembled field of astonished spectators from Agra and Lahore, killed the eagle on the spot. Amaze-ment seized the sultan at the unequal contest, and burning admiration for its unparalleled result. He commanded that the hawk should be brought before him; he caressed the bird with enthusiasm; and he ordered that, for the commemoration of his matchless courage, a diadem of gold and rubies should be solemnly placed on the hawk's head; but then that immediately after this solemn coronation, the bird should be led off to execution, as the most valiant indeed of traitors, but not the less a traitor, as having dared to rise rebelliously against his liege lord and anointed sovereign, the eagle. "Now," said I to the Welshman, "to you and me, as men of refined sensibilities, how painful it would have been that this poor Brummagen brute, the 'Tallyho,' in the impossible case of victory over us, should have been crowned with Birmingham tinsel, with paste diamonds, and Roman pearls, and then led off to instant execution." The Welshman doubted if that could be warranted by law. And when I hinted at the 6th of Edward Longshanks, chap. 18, for regulating the precedence of coaches, as being probably the statute relied on for the capital punishment of such offences, he replied drily that if the attempt to pass a mail rally were treasonable, it was a pity that the "Tallyho" appeared to have so imperfect an acquaintance with law.

The modern modes of travelling cannot compare with the old mail-coach system in grandeur and power. They boast of more velocity, not, however,

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

as a consciousness, but as a fact of our lifeless knowledge, resting upon *alien* evidence ; as, for instance, because somebody *says* that we have gone fifty miles in the hour, though we are far from feeling it as a personal experience, or upon the evidence of a result, as that actually we find ourselves in York four hours after leaving London. Apart from such an assertion, or such a result, I myself am little aware of the pace. But, seated on the old mail-coach, we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity. On this system the word was, *Non magna loquimur*, as upon railways, but *vivimus*. Yes, "*magna vivimus*"; we do not make verbal ostentation of our grandeurs, we realise our grandeurs in act, and in the very experience of life. The vital experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubt impossible on the question of our speed ; we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it, as a thrilling ; and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest amongst brutes, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles, and thunder-beating hoofs. The sensibility of the horse, uttering itself in the maniac light of his eye, might be the last vibration of such a movement ; the glory of Salamanca might be the first. But the intervening links that connected them, that spread the earthquake of battle into the eyeball of the horse, were the heart of man and its electric thrillings—kindling in the rapture of the fiery strife, and then propagating its own tumults by contagious shouts and gestures to the heart of his servant the horse.

But now, on the new system of travelling, iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man's heart from the ministers of his locomotion. Nile nor Trafalgar has power to raise an extra bubble in a steam-kettle. The galvanic cycle is broken up for

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

ever ; man's imperial nature no longer sends itself forward through the electric sensibility of the horse ; the inter-agencies are gone in the mode of communication between the horse and his master, out of which grew so many aspects of sublimity under accidents of mists that hid, or sudden blazes that revealed, of mobs that agitated, or midnight solitudes that awed. Tidings, fitted to convulse all nations, must henceforwards travel by culinary process ; and the trumpet that once announced from afar the laurelled mail, heart-shaking, when heard screaming on the wind, and proclaiming itself through the darkness to every village or solitary house on its route, has now given way for ever to the pot-walloping of the boiler.

Thus have perished multiform openings for public expressions of interest, scenical yet natural, in great national tidings ; for revelations of faces and groups that could not offer themselves amongst the fluctuating mobs of a railway station. The gatherings of gazers about a laurelled mail had one centre, and acknowledged one sole interest. But the crowds attending at a railway station have as little unity as running water, and own as many centres as there are separate carriages in the train.

How else, for example, than as a constant watcher for the dawn, and for the London mail that in summer months entered about daybreak amongst the lawny thickets of Marlborough forest, couldst thou, sweet Fanny of the Bath road, have become the glorified inmate of my dreams ? Yet Fanny, as the loveliest young woman for face and person that perhaps in my whole life I have beheld, merited the station which even now, from a distance of forty years, she holds in my dreams ; yes, though by links of natural association she brings along with her a troop of dreadful creatures, fabulous and

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

not fabulous, that are more abominable to the heart, than Fanny and the dawn are delightful.

Miss Fanny of the Bath road, strictly speaking, lived at a mile's distance from that road; but came so continually to meet the mail, that I on my frequent transits rarely missed her, and naturally connected her image with the great thoroughfare where only I had ever seen her. Why she came so punctually, I do not exactly know; but I believe with some burden of commissions to be executed in Bath, which had gathered to her own residence as a central rendezvous for converging them. The mail-coachman who drove the Bath mail, and wore the royal livery, happened to be Fanny's grandfather. A good man he was, that loved his beautiful granddaughter; and, loving her wisely, was vigilant over her deportment in any case where young Oxford might happen to be concerned. Did my vanity then suggest that I myself, individually, could fall within the line of his terrors? Certainly not, as regarded any physical pretensions that I could plead; for Fanny (as a chance passenger from her own neighbourhood once told me) counted in her train a hundred and ninety-nine professed admirers, if not open aspirants to her favour; and probably not one of the whole brigade but excelled myself in personal advantages. Ulysses even, with the unfair advantage of his accursed bow, could hardly have undertaken that amount of suitors. So the danger might have seemed slight—only that woman is universally aristocratic; it is amongst her nobilities of heart that she *is* so. Now, the aristocratic distinctions in my favour might easily with Miss Fanny have compensated my physical deficiencies. Did I then make love to Fanny? Why, yes; about as much love as one *could* make whilst the mail was changing horses—a process which, ten years later, did not

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

occupy above eighty seconds; but *then*—viz., about Waterloo—it occupied five times eighty. Now, four hundred seconds offer a field quite ample enough for whispering into a young woman's ear a great deal of truth, and (by way of parenthesis) some trifle of falsehood. Grandpapa did right, therefore, to watch me. And yet, as happens too often to the grandpapas of earth, in a contest with the admirers of granddaughters, how vainly would he have watched me had I meditated any evil whispers to Fanny! She, it is my belief, would have protected herself against any man's evil suggestions. But he, as the result showed, could not have intercepted the opportunities for such suggestions. Yet, why not? Was he not active? Was he not blooming? Blooming he was as Fanny herself.

Say, all our praises why should lords—

Stop, that's not the line.

Say, all our roses why should girls engross?

The coachman showed rosy blossoms on his face deeper even than his granddaughter's—*his* being drawn from the ale cask, Fanny's from the fountains of the dawn. But, in spite of his blooming face, some infirmities he had; and one particularly in which he too much resembled a crocodile. This lay in a monstrous inaptitude for turning round. The crocodile, I presume, owes that inaptitude to the absurd *length* of his back; but in our grandpapa it arose rather from the absurd *breadth* of his back, combined, possibly, with some growing stiffness in his legs. Now, upon this crocodile infirmity of his I planted a human advantage for tendering my homage to Miss Fanny. In defiance of all his honourable vigilance, no sooner had he presented to us his mighty Jovian back (what a field for dis-

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

playing to mankind his royal scarlet!), whilst inspecting professionally the buckles, the straps, and the silvery turrets of his harness, than I raised Miss Fanny's hand to my lips, and, by the mixed tenderness and respectfulness of my manner, caused her easily to understand how happy it would make me to rank upon her list as No. 10 or 12, in which case a few casualties amongst her lovers (and observe, they *hanged* liberally in those days) might have promoted me speedily to the top of the tree; as, on the other hand, with how much loyalty of submission I acquiesced by anticipation in her award, supposing that she should plant me in the very rear-ward of her favour, as No. 199 + 1. Most truly I loved this beautiful and ingenuous girl; and had it not been for the Bath mail, timing all courtships by post-office allowance, heaven only knows what might have come of it. People talk of being over head and ears in love; now, the mail was the cause that I sank only over ears in love, which, you know, still left a trifle of brain to overlook the whole conduct of the affair.

Ah, reader! when I look back upon those days, it seems to me that all things change—all things perish. "Perish the roses and the palms of kings": perish even the crowns and trophies of Waterloo: thunder and lightning are not the thunder and lightning which I remember. Roses are degenerating. The Fannies of our island—though this I say with reluctance—are not visibly improving; and the Bath road is notoriously superannuated. Crocodiles, you will say, are stationary. Mr Waterton tells me that the crocodile does *not* change; that a cayman, in fact, or an alligator, is just as good for riding upon as he was in the time of the Pharaohs. *That* may be; but the reason is, that the crocodile does not live fast—he is a slow coach. I believe it is generally understood among

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

naturalists, that the crocodile is a blockhead. It is my own impression that the Pharaohs were also blockheads. Now, as the Pharaohs and the crocodile domineered over Egyptian society, this accounts for a singular mistake that prevailed through innumerable generations on the Nile. The crocodile made the ridiculous blunder of supposing man to be meant chiefly for his own eating. Man, taking a different view of the subject, naturally met that mistake by another: he viewed the crocodile as a thing sometimes to worship, but always to run away from. And this continued until Mr Waterton changed the relations between the animals. The mode of escaping from the reptile he showed to be, not by running away, but by leaping on its back, booted and spurred. The two animals had misunderstood each other. The use of the crocodile has now been cleared up—viz., to be ridden, and the final cause of man is, that he may improve the health of the crocodile by riding him a-fox-hunting before breakfast. And it is pretty certain that any crocodile, who has been regularly hunted through the season, and is master of the weight he carries, will take a six-barred gate now as well as ever he would have done in the infancy of the pyramids.

Perhaps, therefore, the crocodile does *not* change, but all things else *do*; even the shadow of the Pyramids grows less. And often the restoration in vision of Fanny and the Bath road makes me too pathetically sensible of that truth. Out of the darkness, if I happen to call up the image of Fanny from thirty-five years back, arises suddenly a rose in June; or, if I think for an instant of a rose in June, up rises the heavenly face of Fanny. One after the other, like the antiphonies in a choral service, rises Fanny and the rose in June, then back again the rose in June and Fanny. Then come both together, as in a chorus; roses and Fannies,

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

Fannies and roses, without end—thick as blossoms in paradise. Then comes a venerable crocodile, in a royal livery of scarlet and gold, or in a coat with sixteen capes ; and the crocodile is driving four-in-hand from the box of the Bath mail. And suddenly we upon the mail are pulled up by a mighty dial, sculptured with the hours, and with the dreadful legend of *Too Late*. Then all at once we are arrived in Marlborough forest, amongst the lovely households of the roe-deer : these retire into the dewy thickets ; the thickets are rich with roses , the roses call up (as ever) the sweet countenance of Fanny, who, being the granddaughter of a crocodile, awakens a dreadful host of wild semi-legendary animals—griffins, dragons, basilisks, sphinxes—till at length the whole vision of fighting images crowds into one towering armorial shield, a vast emblazonry of human charities and human loveliness that have perished, but quartered heraldically with unutterable horrors of monstrous and demoniac natures ; whilst over all rises, as a surmounting crest, one fair female hand, with the forefinger pointing, in sweet, sorrowful admonition, upwards to heaven, and having power (which, without experience, I never could have believed) to awaken the pathos that kills, in the very bosom of the horrors that madden, the grief that gnaws at the heart, together with the monstrous creations of darkness that shock the belief, and make dizzy the reason, of man. This is the peculiarity that I wish the reader to notice, as having first been made known to me for a possibility by this early vision of Fanny on the Bath road. The peculiarity consisted in the confluence of two different keys, though apparently repelling each other, into the music and governing principles of the same dream ; horror, such as possesses the maniac, and yet, by momentary transitions, grief, such as may be

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

supposed to possess the dying mother when leaving her infant children to the mercies of the cruel. Usually, and perhaps always, in an unshaken nervous system, these two modes of misery exclude each other—here first they met in horrid reconciliation. There was always a separate peculiarity in the quality of the horror. This was afterwards developed into far more revolting complexities of misery and incomprehensible darkness ; and perhaps I am wrong in ascribing any value as a *causative* agency to this particular case on the Bath road—possibly it furnished merely an *occasion* that accidentally introduced a mode of horrors certain, at any rate, to have grown up, with or without the Bath road, from more advanced stages of the nervous derangement. Yet, as the cubs of tigers or leopards, when domesticated, have been observed to suffer a sudden development of their latent ferocity under too eager an appeal to their playfulness—the gaieties of sport in *them* being too closely connected with the fiery brightness of their murderous instincts—so I have remarked that the caprices, the gay arabesques, and the lively floral luxuriations of dreams, betray a shocking tendency to pass into finer maniacal splendours. That gaiety, for instance, in the dreaming faculty, by which one principal point of resemblance to a crocodile in the mail-coachman was soon made to clothe him with the form of a crocodile, and yet was blended with accessory circumstances derived from his human functions, passed rapidly into a further development, no longer gay or playful, but terrific, the most terrific that besieges dreams—viz., the horrid inoculation upon each other of incompatible natures. This horror has always been secretly felt by man ; it was felt even under pagan forms of religion, which offered a very feeble, and also a very limited, gamut for giving expression to

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

the human capacities of sublimity or of horror. We read it in the fearful composition of the sphinx. The dragon, again, is the snake inoculated upon the scorpion. The basilisk unites the mysterious malice of the evil eye, unintentional on the part of the unhappy agent, with the intentional venom of some other malignant natures. But these horrid complexities of evil agency are but objectively horrid; they inflict the horror suitable to their compound nature; but there is no insinuation that they *feel* that horror. Heraldry is so full of these fantastic creatures that, in some zoologies, we find a separate chapter or a supplement dedicated to what is denominated heraldic zoology. And why not? For these hideous creatures, however visionary, have a real traditionary ground in mediæval belief—sincere and partly reasonable, though adulterating with mendacity, blundering, credulity, and intense superstition. But the dream-horror of which I speak is far more frightful. The dreamer finds housed within himself—occupying, as it were, some separate chamber in his brain—holding, perhaps, from that station a secret and detestable commerce with his own heart—some horrid alien nature. What if it were his own nature repeated—still, if the duality were distinctly perceptible, even that—even this mere numerical double of his own consciousness—might be a curse too mighty to be sustained. But how if the alien nature contradicts his own, fights with it, perplexes and confounds it? How, again, if not one alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself? These, however, are horrors from the kingdom of anarchy and darkness, which, by their very intensity, challenge the sanctity of concealment, and gloomily retire from exposition. Yet it was necessary to mention them, because the first

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

introduction to such appearances (whether causal or merely casual) lay in the heraldic monsters, which monsters were themselves introduced (though playfully) by the transfigured coachman of the Bath mail.

Going down with Victory

But the grandest chapter of our experience, within the whole mail-coach service, was on those occasions when we went down from London with the news of victory. A period of about ten years stretched from Trafalgar to Waterloo; the second and third years of which period (1806 and 1807) were comparatively sterile; but the other nine (from 1805 to 1815 inclusively) furnished a long succession of victories; the least of which, in such a contest of Titans, had an inappreciable value of position partly for its absolute interference with the plans of our enemy, but still more from its keeping alive through central Europe the sense of a deep-seated vulnerability in France. Even to tease the coasts of our enemy, to mortify them by continual blockades, to insult them by capturing if it were but a baubling schooner under the eyes of their arrogant armies, repeated from time to time a sullen proclamation of power lodged in one quarter to which the hopes of Christendom turned in secret. How much more loudly must this proclamation have spoken in the audacity of having bearded the *élite* of their troops, and having beaten them in pitched battles! Five years of life it was worth paying down for the privilege of an outside place on a mail-coach, when carrying down the first tidings of any such event. And it is to be noted that, from our insular situation, and the multitude of our frigates disposable for the rapid transmission of intelligence, rarely did any unauthorised rumour steal away a prelibation from the first aroma of the regular

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

despatches. The government news was generally the earliest news.

From 8 P.M., to fifteen or twenty minutes later, imagine the mails assembled on parade in Lombard Street, where, at that time, and not in St Martin's-le-Grand, was seated the General Post-office. In what exact strength we mustered I do not remember; but, from the length of each separate *attelage*, we filled the street, though a long one, and though we were drawn up in double file. On *any* night the spectacle was beautiful. The absolute perfection of all the appointments about the carriages and the harness, their strength, their brilliant cleanliness, their beautiful simplicity—but, more than all, the royal magnificence of the horses—were what might first have fixed the attention. Every carriage, on every morning in the year, was taken down to an official inspector for examination—wheels, axles, linchpins, pole, glasses, lamps, were all critically probed and tested. Every part of every carriage had been cleaned, every horse had been groomed, with as much rigour as if they belonged to a private gentleman; and that part of the spectacle offered itself always. But the night before us is a night of victory; and, behold! to the ordinary display, what a heart-shaking addition!—horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak-leaves and ribbons. The guards, as being officially his Majesty's servants, and of the coachmen such as are within the privilege of the post-office, wear the royal liveries of course; and as it is summer (for all the *land* victories were naturally won in summer), they wear, on this fine evening, these liveries exposed to view, without any covering of upper coats. Such a costume, and the elaborate arrangement of the laurels in their hats, dilate their hearts, by giving to them openly a personal connection with the great news,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

in which already they have the general interest of patriotism. That great national sentiment surmounts and quells all sense of ordinary distinctions. Those passengers who happen to be gentlemen are now hardly to be distinguished as such except by dress ; for the usual reserve of their manner in speaking to the attendants has on this night melted away. One heart, one pride, one glory, connects every man by the transcendent bond of his national blood. The spectators, who are numerous beyond precedent, express their sympathy with these fervent feelings by continual hurrahs. Every moment are shouted aloud by the post-office servants, and summoned to draw up, the great ancestral names of cities known to history through a thousand years—Lincoln, Winchester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling, Aberdeen—expressing the grandeur of the empire by the antiquity of its towns, and the grandeur of the mail establishment by the diffusive radiation of its separate missions. Every moment you hear the thunder of lids locked down upon the mail-bags. That sound to each individual mail is the signal for drawing off, which process is the finest part of the entire spectacle. Then come the horses into play. Horses ! can these be horses that bound off with the action and gestures of leopards ? What stir !—what sea-like ferment !—what a thundering of wheels !—what a trampling of hoofs !—what a sounding of trumpets !—what farewell cheers—what redoubling peals of brotherly congratulation, connecting the name of the particular mail—“Liverpool for ever !”—with the name of the particular victory—“Badajoz for ever !” or “Salamanca for ever !” The half-slumbering consciousness that, all night long, and all the next day—perhaps for even a longer period—many of

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

these mails, like fire racing along a train of gun-powder, will be kindling at every instant new successions of burning joy, has an obscure effect of multiplying the victory itself, by multiplying to the imagination into infinity the stages of its progressive diffusion. A fiery arrow seems to be let loose, which from that moment is destined to travel, without intermission, westwards for three hundred miles—northwards for six hundred; and the sympathy of our Lombard Street friends at parting is exalted a hundredfold by a sort of visionary sympathy with the yet slumbering sympathies which in so vast a succession we are going to awake.

Liberated from the embarrassments of the city, and issuing into the broad uncrowded avenues of the northern suburbs, we soon begin to enter upon our natural pace of ten miles an hour. In the broad light of the summer evening, the sun, perhaps, only just at the point of setting, we are seen from every storey of every house. Heads of every age crowd to the windows—young and old understand the language of our victorious symbols—and rolling volleys of sympathising cheers run along us, behind us, and before us. The beggar, rearing himself against the wall, forgets his lameness—real or assumed—thinks not of his whining trade, but stands erect, with bold exulting smiles, as we pass him. The victory has healed him, and says, Be thou whole! Women and children, from garrets alike and cellars, through infinite London, look down or look up with loving eyes upon our gay ribbons and our martial laurels; sometimes kiss their hands; sometimes hang out, as signals of affection, pocket-handkerchiefs, aprons, dusters, anything that, by catching the summer breezes, will express an aerial jubilation. On the London side of Barnet, to which we draw near within a few minutes after nine, observe that private carriage

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

which is approaching us. The weather being so warm, the glasses are all down ; and one may read, as on the stage of a theatre, everything that goes on within. It contains three ladies—one likely to be “mamma,” and two of seventeen or eighteen, who are probably her daughters. What lovely animation, what beautiful unpremeditated pantomime, explaining to us every syllable that passes, in these ingenuous girls ! By the sudden start and raising of the hands, on first discovering our laurelled equipage !—by the sudden movement and appeal to the elder lady from both of them—and by the heightened colour on their animated countenances, we can almost hear them saying, “See, see ! Look at their laurels ! Oh, mamma ! there has been a great battle in Spain ; and it has been a great victory.” In a moment we are on the point of passing them. We passengers—I on the box, and the two on the roof behind me—raise our hats to the ladies ; the coachman makes his professional salute with the whip ; the guard even, though punctilious on the matter of his dignity as an officer under the crown, touches his hat. The ladies move to us, in return, with a winning graciousness of gesture, all smile on each side in a way that nobody could misunderstand, and that nothing short of a grand national sympathy could so instantaneously prompt. Will these ladies say that we are nothing to *them* ? Oh, no ; they will not say *that*. They cannot deny—they do not deny—that for this night they are our sisters ; gentle or simple, scholar or illiterate servant, for twelve hours to come, we on the outside have the honour to be their brothers. Those poor women, again, who stop to gaze upon us with delight at the entrance of Barnet, and seem, by their air of weariness, to be returning from labour—do you mean to say that they are washerwomen and charwomen ? Oh, my

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

poor friend, you are quite mistaken. I assure you they stand in a far higher rank ; for this one night they feel themselves by birth-right to be daughters of England, and answer to no humbler title.

Every joy, however, even rapturous joy—such is the sad law of earth—may carry with it grief, or fear of grief, to some. Three miles beyond Barnet, we see approaching us another private carriage, nearly repeating the circumstances of the former case. Here, also, the glasses are all down—here, also, is an elderly lady seated ; but the two daughters are missing ; for the single young person sitting by the lady's side, seems to be an attendant—so I judge from her dress, and her air of respectful reserve. The lady is in mourning ; and her countenance expresses sorrow. At first she does not look up ; so that I believe she is not aware of our approach, until she hears the measured beating of our horses' hoofs. Then she raises her eyes to settle them painfully on our triumphal equipage. Our decorations explain the case to her at once ; but she beholds them with apparent anxiety, or even with terror. Some time before this I, finding it difficult to hit a flying mark, when embarrassed by the coachman's person and reins intervening, had given to the guard a *Courier* evening paper, containing the gazette, for the next carriage that might pass. Accordingly he tossed it in, & folded that the huge capitals expressing some such legend as—GLORIOUS VICTORY, might catch the eye at once. To see the paper, however, at all, interpreted as it was by our ensigns of triumph, explained everything ; and, if the guard were right in thinking the lady to have received it with a gesture of horror, it could not be doubtful that she had suffered some deep personal affliction in connection with this Spanish war.

Here, now, was the case of one who, having

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

formerly suffered, might, erroneously perhaps, be distressing herself with anticipations of another similar suffering. That same night, and hardly three hours later, occurred the reverse case. A poor woman, who too probably would find herself, in a day or two, to have suffered the heaviest of afflictions by the battle, blindly allowed herself to express an exultation so unmeasured in the news and its details, as gave to her the appearance which amongst Celtic Highlanders is called *fey*. This was at some little town where we changed horses an hour or two after midnight. Some fair or wake had kept the people out of their beds, and had occasioned a partial illumination of the stalls and booths, presenting an unusual but very impressive effect. We saw many lights moving about as we drew near; and perhaps the most striking scene on the whole route was our reception at this place. The flashing of torches and the beautiful radiance of blue lights (technically, Bengal lights) upon the heads of our horses; the fine effect of such a showery and ghostly illumination falling upon our flowers and glittering laurels; whilst all around ourselves, that formed a centre of light, the darkness gathered on the rear and flanks in massy blackness; these optical splendours, together with the prodigious enthusiasm of the people, composed a picture at once scenical and affecting, theatrical and holy. As we stayed for three or four minutes, I alighted; and immediately from a dismantled stall in the street, where no doubt she had been presiding through the earlier part of the night, advanced eagerly a middle-aged woman. The sight of my newspaper it was that had drawn her attention upon myself. The victory which we were carrying down to the provinces on *this* occasion, was the imperfect one of Talavera—imperfect for its results, such was the virtual

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

treachery of the Spanish general, Cuesta, but not imperfect in its ever-memorable heroism. I told her the main outline of the battle. The agitation of her enthusiasm had been so conspicuous when listening, and when first applying for information, that I could not but ask her if she had not some relative in the Peninsular army. Oh, yes; her only son was there. In what regiment? He was a trooper in the 23rd Dragoons. My heart sank within me as she made that answer. This sublime regiment, which an Englishman should never mention without raising his hat to their memory, had made the most memorable and effective charge recorded in military annals. They leaped their horses—*over* a trench where they could, *into* it, and with the result of death or mutilation when they could *not*. What proportion cleared the trench is nowhere stated. Those who *did*, closed up and went down upon the enemy with such divinity of fervour (I use the word *divinity* by design: the inspiration of God must have prompted this movement to those whom even then He was calling to His presence), that two results followed. As regarded the enemy, this 23rd Dragoons, not, I believe, originally three hundred and fifty strong, paralysed a French column, six thousand strong, then ascended the hill, and fixed the gaze of the whole French army. As regarded themselves, the 23rd were supposed at first to have been barely not annihilated; but eventually, I believe, about one in four survived. And this, then, was the regiment—a regiment already for some hours glorified and hallowed to the ear of all London, as lying stretched, by a large majority, upon one bloody aceldama—in which the young trooper served whose mother was now talking in a spirit of such joyous enthusiasm. Did I tell her the truth? Had I the heart to break up her dreams?

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

No. To-morrow, said I to myself—to-morrow, or the next day, will publish the worst. For one night more, wherefore should she not sleep in peace? After to-morrow, the chances are too many that peace will forsake her pillow. This brief respite, then, let her owe to *my* gift and *my* forbearance. But, if I told her not of the bloody price that had been paid, not, therefore, was I silent on the contributions from her son's regiment to that day's service and glory. I showed her not the funeral banners under which the noble regiment was sleeping. I lifted not the overshadowing laurels from the bloody trench in which horse and rider lay mangled together. But I told her how these dear children of England, officers and privates, had leaped their horses over all obstacles as gaily as hunters to the morning's chase. I told her how they rode their horses into the mists of death (saying to myself, but not saying to *her*), and laid down their young lives for thee, O mother England! as willingly—poured out their noble blood as cheerfully—as ever, after a long day's sport, when infants, they had rested their wearied heads upon their mother's knee, or had sunk to sleep in her arms. Strange it is, yet true, that she seemed to have no fears for her son's safety, even after this knowledge that the 23rd Dragoons had been memorably engaged, but so much was she enraptured by the knowledge that *his* regiment, and therefore that *he*, had rendered conspicuous service in the dreadful conflict—a service which had actually made them, within the last twelve hours, the foremost topic of conversation in London—so absolutely was fear swallowed up in joy—that, in the mere simplicity of her fervent nature, the poor woman threw her arms round my neck, as she thought of her son, and gave to *me* the kiss which secretly was meant for *him*.

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

Section II

THE VISION OF SUDDEN DEATH

What is to be taken as the predominant opinion of man, reflective and philosophic, upon SUDDEN DEATH? It is remarkable that, in different conditions of society, sudden death has been variously regarded as the consummation of an earthly career most fervently to be desired, or, again, as that consummation which is with most horror to be deprecated. Cæsar the Dictator, at his last dinner party (*cæna*), on the very evening before his assassination, when the minutes of his earthly career were numbered, being asked what death, in *his* judgment, might be pronounced the most eligible, replied, "That which should be most sudden." On the other hand, the divine Litany of our English Church, when breathing forth supplications, as if in some representative character for the whole human race prostrate before God, places such a death in the very van of horrors:—"From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from SUDDEN DEATH—*Good Lord, deliver us.*" Sudden death is here made to crown the climax in a grand ascent of calamities; it is ranked among the last of curses; and yet, by the noblest of Romans, it was ranked as the first of blessings. In that difference, most readers will see little more than the essential difference between Christianity and Paganism. But this, on consideration, I doubt. The Christian Church may be right in its estimate of sudden death; and it is a natural feeling, though after all it may also be an infirm one, to wish for a quiet dismissal from life—as that which *seems* most reconcilable with meditation, with penitential retrospects, and with the humilities of farewell prayer. There does not, however,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

occur to me any direct scriptural warrant for this earnest petition of the English Litany, unless under a special construction of the word "sudden." It seems a petition—indulged rather and conceded to human infirmity, than exacted from human piety. It is not so much a doctrine built upon the eternities of the Christian system, as a plausible opinion built upon special varieties of physical temperament. Let that, however, be as it may, two remarks suggest themselves as prudent restraints upon a doctrine, which else *may* wander, and *has* wandered, into an uncharitable superstition. The first is this: that many people are likely to exaggerate the horror of a sudden death, from the disposition to lay a false stress upon words or acts, simply because by an accident they have become *final* words or acts. If a man dies, for instance, by some sudden death when he happens to be intoxicated, such a death is falsely regarded with peculiar horror; as though the intoxication were suddenly exalted into a blasphemy. But *that* is unphilosophic. The man was, or he was not, *habitually* a drunkard. If not, if his intoxication were a solitary accident, there can be no reason for allowing special emphasis to this act, simply because through misfortune it became his final act. Nor, on the other hand, if it were no accident, but one of his *habitual* transgressions, will it be the more habitual or the more a transgression, because some sudden calamity, surprising him, has caused this habitual transgression to be also a final one. Could the man have had any reason even dimly to foresee his own sudden death, there would have been a new feature in his act of intemperance—a feature of presumption and irreverence, as in one that, having known himself drawing near to the presence of God, should have suited his demeanour to an expectation so awful. And the only new element in the man's act is not

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

any element of special immorality, but simply of special misfortune.

The other remark has reference to the meaning of the word *sudden*. Very possibly Cæsar and the Christian Church do not differ in the way supposed ; that is, do not differ by any difference of doctrine as between Pagan and Christian views of the moral temper appropriate to death, but perhaps they are contemplating different cases. Both contemplate a violent death, a *βιαθάνατος*—death that is *βίαιος*, or, in other words, death that is brought about, not by internal and spontaneous change, but by active force having its origin from without. In this meaning the two authorities agree. Thus far they are in harmony. But the difference is, that the Roman by the word “sudden” means *un-lingering*; whereas the Christian Litany by “sudden death” means a death *without warning*, consequently without any available summons to religious preparation. The poor mutineer, who kneels down to gather into his heart the bullets from twelve firelocks of his pitying comrades, dies by a most sudden death in Cæsar’s sense ; one shock, one mighty spasm, one (possibly *not* one) groan, and all is over. But, in the sense of the Litany, the mutineer’s death is far from sudden ; his offence originally, his imprisonment, his trial, the interval between his sentence and its execution, having all furnished him with separate warnings of his fate—having all summoned him to meet it with solemn preparation.

Here at once, in this sharp verbal distinction, we comprehend the faithful earnestness with which a holy Christian Church pleads on behalf of her poor departing children, that God would vouchsafe to them the last great privilege and distinction possible on a death-bed—viz., the opportunity of untroubled preparation for facing this mighty trial. Sudden death, as a mere variety in the modes of dying,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

where death in some shape is inevitable, proposes a question of choice which, equally in the Roman and the Christian sense, will be variously answered according to each man's variety of temperament. Meantime, one aspect of sudden death there is, one modification, upon which no doubt can arise, that of all martyrdoms it is the most agitating—viz., where it surprises a man under circumstances which offer (or which seem to offer) some hurrying, flying, inappreciably minute chance of evading it. Sudden as the danger which it affronts, must be any effort by which such an evasion can be accomplished. Even *that*, even the sickening necessity for hurrying in extremity where all hurry seems destined to be vain, even that anguish is liable to a hideous exasperation in one particular case—viz., where the appeal is made not exclusively to the instinct of self-preservation, but to the conscience, on behalf of some other life besides your own accidentally thrown upon *your* protection. To fail, to collapse in a service merely your own, might seem comparatively venial; though, in fact, it is far from venial. But to fail in a case where Providence has suddenly thrown into your hands the final interests of another—a fellow-creature shuddering between the gates of life and death; this, to a man of apprehensive conscience, would mingle the misery of an atrocious criminality with the misery of a bloody calamity. You are called upon, by the case supposed, possibly to die; but to die at the very moment when, by any even partial failure, or effeminate collapse of your energies, you will be self-denounced as a murderer. You had but the twinkling of an eye for your effort, and that effort might have been unavailing; but to have risen to the level of such an effort, would have rescued you, though not from dying, yet from dying as a traitor to your final and farewell duty.

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

The situation here contemplated exposes a dreadful ulcer, lurking far down in the depths of human nature. It is not that men generally are summoned to face such awful trials. But potentially and in shadowy outline, such a trial is moving subterraneously in perhaps all men's natures. Upon the secret mirror of our dreams such a trial is darkly projected, perhaps, to every one of us. That dream, so familiar to childhood, of meeting a lion, and, through languishing prostration in hope and the energies of hope, that constant sequel of lying down before the lion, publishes the secret frailty of human nature—reveals its deep-seated falsehood to itself—records its abysmal treachery. Perhaps not one of us escapes that dream; perhaps, as by some sorrowful doom of man, that dream repeats for every one of us, through every generation, the original temptation in Eden. Every one of us, in this dream, has a bait offered to the infirm places of his own individual will; once again a snare is presented for tempting him into captivity to a luxury of ruin; once again, as in aboriginal Paradise, the man falls by his own choice; again, by infinite iteration, the ancient earth groans to Heaven, through her secret caves, over the weakness of her child: "Nature, from her seat, sighing through all her works," again "gives signs of woe that all is lost"; and again the counter sigh is repeated to the sorrowing heavens for the endless rebellion against God. It is not without probability that in the world of dreams every one of us ratifies for himself the original transgression. In dreams, perhaps under some secret conflict of the midnight sleeper, lighted up to the consciousness at the time, but darkened to the memory as soon as all is finished, each several child of our mysterious race completes for himself the treason of the aboriginal fall.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

The incident, so memorable in itself by its features of horror, and so scenical by its grouping for the eye, which furnished the text for this reverie upon *Sudden Death*, occurred to myself in the dead of night, as a solitary spectator, when seated on the box of the Manchester and Glasgow mail, in the second or third summer after Waterloo. I find it necessary to relate the circumstances, because they are such as could not have occurred unless under a singular combination of accidents. In those days, the oblique and lateral communications with many rural post-offices were so arranged, either through necessity or through defect of system, as to make it requisite for the main north-western mail (*i.e.*, the *down* mail), on reaching Manchester, to halt for a number of hours; how many, I do not remember; six or seven, I think; but the result was, that, in the ordinary course, the mail recommenced its journey northwards about midnight. Wearied with the long detention at a gloomy hotel, I walked out about eleven o'clock at night for the sake of fresh air; meaning to fall in with the mail and resume my seat at the post-office. The night, however, being yet dark, as the moon had scarcely risen, and the streets being at that hour empty, so as to offer no opportunities for asking the road, I lost my way, and did not reach the post-office until it was considerably past midnight; but, to my great relief (as it was important for me to be in Westmoreland by the morning), I saw in the huge saucer eyes of the mail, blazing through the gloom, an evidence that my chance was not yet lost. Past the time it was; but, by some rare accident, the mail was not even yet ready to start. I ascended to my seat on the box, where my cloak was still lying as it had lain at the Bridgewater Arms. I had left it there in imitation of a nautical discoverer, who leaves a bit of bunting on the shore of his discovery, by way

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

of warning off the ground the whole human race, and notifying to the Christian and heathen worlds, with his best compliments, that he has hoisted his pocket-handkerchief once and for ever upon that virgin soil; thenceforward claiming the *jus domini* to the top of the atmosphere above it, and also the right of driving shafts to the centre of the earth below it; so that all people found after this warning, either aloft in upper chambers of the atmosphere, or groping in subterraneous shafts, or squatting audaciously on the surface of the soil, will be treated as trespassers—kicked, that is to say, or decapitated, as circumstances may suggest, by their very faithful servant, the owner of the said pocket-handkerchief. In the present case, it is probable that my cloak might not have been respected, and the *jus gentium* might have been cruelly violated in my person—for, in the dark, people commit deeds of darkness, gas being a great ally of morality—but it so happened that, on this night, there was no other outside passenger; and thus the crime, which else was but too probable, missed fire for want of a criminal.

Having mounted the box, I took a small quantity of laudanum, having already travelled two hundred and fifty miles—viz., from a point seventy miles beyond London. In the taking of laudanum there was nothing extraordinary. But by accident it drew upon me the special attention of my assessor on the box, the coachman. And in *that* also there was nothing extraordinary. But by accident, and with great delight, it drew my own attention to the fact that this coachman was a monster in point of bulk, and that he had but one eye. In fact, he had been foretold by Virgil as

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.

He answered to the conditions in every one of the items:—1, a monster he was; 2, dreadful;

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

3, shapeless ; 4, huge ; 5, who had lost an eye. But why should *that* delight me ? Had he been one of the Calendars in the *Arabian Nights*, and had paid down his eye as the price of his criminal curiosity, what right had *I* to exult in his misfortune ? I did *not* exult : I delighted in no man's punishment, though it were even merited. But these personal distinctions (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) identified in an instant an old friend of mine, whom I had known in the south for some years as the most masterly of mail-coachmen. He was the man in all Europe that could (if *any* could) have driven six-in-hand full gallop over *Al Sirat*—that dreadful bridge of Mahomet, with no side battlements, and of *extra* room not enough for a razor's edge—leading right across the bottomless gulf. Under this eminent man, whom in Greek I cognominated Cyclops *diphrelates* (Cyclops the charioteer), I, and others known to me, studied the diphrelatic art. Excuse, reader, a word too elegant to be pedantic. As a pupil, though I paid extra fee, it is to be lamented that I did not stand high in his esteem. It showed his dogged honesty (though, observe, not his discernment), that he could not see my merits. Let us excuse his absurdity in this particular, by remembering his want of an eye. Doubtless *that* made him blind to my merits. In the art of conversation, however, he admitted that I had the whip-hand of him. On this present occasion, great joy was at our meeting. But what was Cyclops doing here ? Had the medical men recommended northern air, or how ? I collected, from such explanations as he volunteered, that he had an interest at stake in some suit-at-law now pending at Lancaster ; so that probably he had got himself transferred to this station, for the purpose of connecting with his professional pursuits an instant readiness for the calls of his lawsuit.

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

Meantime, what are we stopping for? Surely we have now waited long enough. Oh, this procrastinating mail, and this procrastinating post-office! Can't they take a lesson upon that subject, from *me*? Some people have called *me* procrastinating. Yet you are witness, reader, that I was here kept waiting for the post-office. Will the post-office lay its hand on its heart, in its moments of sobriety, and assert that ever it waited for me? What are they about? The guard tells me that there is a large extra accumulation of foreign mails this night, owing to irregularities caused by war, by wind, by weather, in the packet service, which as yet does not benefit at all by steam. For an *extra* hour, it seems, the post-office has been engaged in threshing out the pure wheaten correspondence of Glasgow, and winnowing it from the chaff of all baser intermediate towns. But at last all is finished. Sound your horn, guard. Manchester, good-bye; we've lost an hour by your criminal conduct at the post-office: which, however, though I do not mean to part with a serviceable ground of complaint, and one which really *is* such for the horses, to me secretly is an advantage, since it compels us to look sharply for this lost hour amongst the next eight or nine, and to recover it (if we can) at the rate of one mile extra per hour. Off we are at last, and at eleven miles an hour; and for the moment I detect no changes in the energy or in the skill of Cyclops.

From Manchester to Kendal, which virtually (though not in law) is the capital of Westmoreland, there were at this time seven stages of eleven miles each. The first five of these, counting from Manchester, terminate in Lancaster, which is therefore fifty-five miles north of Manchester, and the same distance exactly from Liverpool. The first three stages terminate in Preston (called, by way

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

of distinction from other towns of that name, *proud* Preston), at which place it is that the separate roads from Liverpool and from Manchester to the north become confluent. Within these first three stages lay the foundation, the progress, and termination of our night's adventure. During the first stage, I found out that Cyclops was mortal: he was liable to the shocking affection of sleep—a thing which previously I had never suspected. If a man indulges in the vicious habit of sleeping, all the skill in aurigation of Apollo himself, with the horses of Aurora to execute his notions, avail him nothing. “Oh, Cyclops!” I exclaimed, “thou art mortal. My friend, thou snoorest.” Through the first eleven miles, however, this infirmity—which I grieve to say that he shared with the whole Pagan Pantheon—betrayed itself only by brief snatches. On waking up, he made an apology for himself, which, instead of mending matters, laid open a gloomy vista of coming disasters. The summer assizes, he reminded me, were now going on at Lancaster: in consequence of which, for three nights and three days, he had not lain down in a bed. During the day, he was waiting for his own summons as a witness on the trial in which he was interested; or else, lest he should be missing at the critical moment, was drinking with the other witnesses, under the pastoral surveillance of the attorneys. During the night, or that part of it which at sea would form the middle watch, he was driving. This explanation certainly accounted for his drowsiness, but in a way which made it much more alarming; since now, after several days' resistance to this infirmity, at length he was steadily giving way. Throughout the second stage he grew more and more drowsy. In the second mile of the third stage, he surrendered himself finally and without a struggle to his perilous temptation. All his past

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

resistance had but deepened the weight of this final oppression. Seven atmospheres of sleep rested upon him; and to consummate the case, our worthy guard, after singing *Love amongst the Roses* for perhaps thirty times, without invitation, and without applause, had in revenge moodily resigned himself to slumber—not so deep, doubtless, as the coachman's, but deep enough for mischief. And thus at last, about ten miles from Preston, it came about that I found myself left in charge of his Majesty's London and Glasgow mail, then running at the least twelve miles an hour.

What made this negligence less criminal than else it must have been thought, was the condition of the roads at night during the assizes. At that time, all the law business of populous Liverpool, and also of populous Manchester, with its vast cincture of populous rural districts, was called up by ancient usage to the tribunal of Lilliputian Lancaster. To break up this old traditional usage required, 1, a conflict with powerful established interests; 2, a large system of new arrangements; and 3, a new parliamentary statute. But as yet this change was merely in contemplation. As things were at present, twice in the year so vast a body of business rolled northwards, from the southern quarter of the county, that for a fortnight at least it occupied the severe exertions of two judges in its despatch. The consequence of this was, that every horse available for such a service, along the whole line of road, was exhausted in carrying down the multitudes of people who were parties to the different suits. By sunset, therefore, it usually happened that, through utter exhaustion amongst men and horses, the road sank into profound silence. Except the exhaustion in the vast adjacent county of York from a contested election, no such

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

silence succeeding to no such fiery uproar was ever witnessed in England.

On this occasion, the usual silence and solitude prevailed along the road. Not a hoof nor a wheel was to be heard. And to strengthen this false luxurious confidence in the noiseless roads, it happened also that the night was one of peculiar solemnity and peace. For my own part, though slightly alive to the possibilities of peril, I had so far yielded to the influence of the mighty calm as to sink into a profound reverie. The month was August, in the middle of which lay my own birthday—a festival to every thoughtful man suggesting solemn and often sigh-born thoughts. The county was my own native county—upon which, in its southern section, more than upon any equal area known to man past or present, had descended the original curse of labour in its heaviest form, not mastering the bodies only of men as of slaves, or criminals in mines, but working through the fiery will. Upon no equal space of earth was, or ever had been, the same energy of human power put forth daily. At this particular season also of the assizes, that dreadful hurricane of flight and pursuit, as it might have seemed to a stranger, which swept to and from Lancaster all day long, hunting the county up and down, and regularly subsiding back into silence about sunset, could not fail (when united with this permanent distinction of Lancashire as the very metropolis and citadel of labour) to point the thoughts pathetically upon that counter vision of rest, of saintly repose from strife and sorrow, towards which, as to their secret haven, the profounder aspirations of man's heart are in solitude continually travelling. Obliquely upon our left we were nearing the sea, which also must, under the present circumstances, be repeating the general state of halcyon repose. The sea, the

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

atmosphere, the light, bore each an orchestral part in this universal lull. Moonlight, and the first timid tremblings of the dawn, were by this time blending ; and the blendings were brought into a still more exquisite state of unity by a slight silvery mist, motionless and dreamy, that covered the woods and fields, but with a veil of equable transparency. Except the feet of our own horses, which, running on a sandy margin of the road, made but little disturbance, there was no sound abroad. In the clouds, and on the earth, prevailed the same majestic peace ; and in spite of all that the villain of a schoolmaster has done for the ruin of our sublimer thoughts, which are the thoughts of our infancy, we still believe in no such nonsense as a limited atmosphere. Whatever we may swear with our false feigning lips, in our faithful hearts we still believe, and must for ever believe, in fields of air traversing the total gulf between earth and the central heavens. Still, in the confidence of children that tread without fear *every* chamber in their father's house, and to whom no door is closed, we, in that Sabbatic vision which sometimes is revealed for an hour upon nights like this, ascend with easy steps from the sorrow-stricken fields of earth, upwards to the sandals of God.

Suddenly, from thoughts like these, I was awakened to a sullen sound, as of some motion on the distant road. It stole upon the air for a moment ; I listened in awe ; but then it died away. Once roused, however, I could not but observe with alarm the quickened motion of our horses. Ten years' experience had made my eye learned in the valuing of motion ; and I saw that we were now running thirteen miles an hour. I pretend to no presence of mind. On the contrary, my fear is, that I am miserably and shamefully deficient in that quality as regards action. The palsy of doubt

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and distraction hangs like some guilty weight of dark unfathomed remembrances upon my energies, when the signal is flying for *action*. But, on the other hand, this accursed gift I have, as regards *thought*, that in the first step towards the possibility of a misfortune, I see its total evolution; in the radix of the series I see too certainly and too instantly its entire expansion; in the first syllable of the dreadful sentence, I read already the last. It was not that I feared for ourselves. *Us*, our bulk and impetus charmed against peril in any collision. And I had ridden through too many hundreds of perils that were frightful to approach, that were matter of laughter to look back upon, the first face of which was horror—the parting face a jest, for any anxiety to rest upon *our* interests. The mail was not built, I felt assured, nor bespoke, that could betray *me* who trusted to its protection. But any carriage that we could meet would be frail and light in comparison of ourselves. And I remarked this ominous accident of our situation. We were on the wrong side of the road. But then, it may be said, the other party, if other there was, might also be on the wrong side; and two wrongs might make a right. *That* was not likely. The same motive which had drawn *us* to the right-hand side of the road—viz., the luxury of the soft beaten sand, as contrasted with the paved centre—would prove attractive to others. The two adverse carriages would therefore, to a certainty, be travelling on the same side; and from this side, as not being ours in law, the crossing over to the other would, of course, be looked for from *us*. Our lamps, still lighted, would give the impression of vigilance on our part. And every creature that met us, would rely upon *us* for quartering. All this, and if the separate links of the anticipation had been a thousand times more, I saw, not dis-

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

cursively, or by effort, or by succession, but by one flash of horrid simultaneous intuition.

Under this steady though rapid anticipation of the evil which *might* be gathering ahead, ah! what a sullen mystery of fear, what a sigh of woe, was that which stole upon the air, as again the far-off sound of a wheel was heard! A whisper it was—a whisper from, perhaps, four miles off—secretly announcing a ruin that, being foreseen, was not the less inevitable; that, being known, was not, therefore, healed. What could be done?—who was it that could do it—to check the storm-flight of these maniacal horses? Could I not seize the reins from the grasp of the slumbering coachman? You, reader, think that it would have been in *your* power to do so. And I quarrel not with your estimate of yourself. But, from the way in which the coachman's hand was viced between his upper and lower thigh, this was impossible. Easy, was it? See, then, that bronze equestrian statue. The cruel rider has kept the bit in his horse's mouth for two centuries. Unbridle him, for a minute, if you please, and wash his mouth with water. Easy, was it? Unhorse me, then, that imperial rider; knock me those marble feet from those marble stirrups of Charlemagne.

The sounds ahead strengthened, and were now too clearly the sounds of wheels. Who and what could it be? Was it industry in a taxed cart? Was it youthful gaiety in a gig? Was it sorrow that loitered, or joy that raced? For as yet the snatches of sound were too intermitting, from distance, to decipher the character of the motion. Whoever were the travellers, something must be done to warn them. Upon the other party rests the active responsibility, but upon *us*—and, woe is me! that *us* was reduced to my frail opium-shattered self—rests the responsibility of warning.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Yet, how should this be accomplished? Might I not sound the guard's horn? Already, on the first thought, I was making my way over the roof to the guard's seat. But this, from the accident which I have mentioned, of the foreign mails' being piled upon the roof, was a difficult and even dangerous attempt to one cramped by nearly three hundred miles of outside travelling. And, fortunately, before I had lost much time in the attempt, our frantic horses swept round an angle of the road, which opened upon us that final stage where the collision must be accomplished, and the catastrophe sealed. All was apparently finished. The court was sitting; the case was heard; the judge had finished; and only the verdict was yet in arrear.

Before us lay an avenue, straight as an arrow, six hundred yards, perhaps, in length; and the umbrageous trees, which rose in a regular line from either side, meeting high overhead, gave to it the character of a cathedral aisle. These trees lent a deeper solemnity to the early light; but there was still light enough to perceive, at the further end of this Gothic aisle, a frail reedy gig, in which were seated a young man, and by his side a young lady. Ah, young sir! what are you about? If it is requisite that you should whisper your communications to this young lady—though really I see nobody, at an hour and on a road so solitary, likely to overhear you—is it therefore requisite that you should carry your lips forward to hers? The little carriage is creeping on at one mile an hour; and the parties within it being thus tenderly engaged, are naturally bending down their heads. Between them and eternity, to all human calculation, there is but a minute and a half. Oh heavens! what is it that I shall do? Speaking or acting, what help can I offer? Strange it is, and to

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

a mere auditor of the tale might seem laughable, that I should need a suggestion from the *Iliad* to prompt the sole resource that remained. Yet so it was. Suddenly I remembered the shout of Achilles, and its effect. But could I pretend to shout like the son of Peleus, aided by Pallas ? No : but then I needed not the shout that should alarm all Asia militant ; such a shout would suffice as might carry terror into the hearts of two thoughtless young people, and one gig-horse. I shouted—and the young man heard me not. A second time I shouted—and now he heard me, for now he raised his head.

Here, then, all had been done that, by me, *could* be done : more on *my* part was not possible. Mine had been the first step ; the second was for the young man ; the third was for God. If, said I, this stranger is a brave man, and if, indeed, he loves the young girl at his side—or, loving her not, if he feels the obligation, pressing upon every man worthy to be called a man, of doing his utmost for a woman confided to his protection—he will, at least, make some effort to save her. If *that* fails, he will not perish the more, or by a death more cruel, for having made it ; and he will die as a brave man should, with his face to the danger, and with his arm about the woman that he sought in vain to save. But, if he makes no effort, shrinking, without a struggle, from his duty, he himself will not the less certainly perish for this baseness of poltroonery. He will die no less : and why not ? Wherefore should we grieve that there is one craven less in the world ? No ; *let him* perish, without a pitying thought of ours wasted upon him ; and, in that case, all our grief will be reserved for the fate of the helpless girl who now, upon the least shadow of failure in *him*, must, by the fiercest of translations—must, without time for a prayer—

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

must, within seventy seconds, stand before the judgment-seat of God.

But craven he was not: sudden had been the call upon him, and sudden was his answer to the call. He saw, he heard, he comprehended, the ruin that was coming down: already its gloomy shadow darkened above him; and already he was measuring his strength to deal with it. Ah! what a vulgar thing does courage seem, when we see nations buying it and selling it for a shilling a day: ah! what a sublime thing does courage seem, when some fearful summons on the great deeps of life carries a man, as if running before a hurricane, up to the giddy crest of some tumultuous crisis, from which lie two courses, and a voice says to him audibly, "One way lies hope; take the other, and mourn for ever!" How grand a triumph, if, even then, amidst the raving of all around him, and the frenzy of the danger, the man is able to confront his situation—is able to retire for a moment into solitude with God, and to seek his counsel from *Him*!

For seven seconds, it might be, of his seventy, the stranger settled his countenance steadfastly upon us, as if to search and value every element in the conflict before him. For five seconds more of his seventy he sat immovably, like one that mused on some great purpose. For five more, perhaps, he sat with eyes upraised, like one that prayed in sorrow, under some extremity of doubt, for light that should guide him to the better choice. Then suddenly he rose; stood upright; and by a powerful strain upon the reins, raising his horse's fore-feet from the ground, he slewed him round on the pivot of his hind-legs, so as to plant the little equipage in a position nearly at right angles to ours. Thus far his condition was not improved; except as a first step had been taken towards the possibility of a second. If no more were done,

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

nothing was done; for the little carriage still occupied the very centre of our path, though in an altered direction. Yet even now it may not be too late: fifteen of the seventy seconds may still be unexhausted; and one almighty bound may avail to clear the ground. Hurry, then, hurry! for the flying moments—*they* hurry! Oh, hurry, hurry, my brave young man! for the cruel hoofs of our horses—*they* also hurry! Fast are the flying moments, faster are the hoofs of our horses. But fear not for *him*, if human energy can suffice; faithful was he that drove to his terrific duty; faithful was the horse to *his* command. One blow, one impulse given with voice and hand, by the stranger, one rush from the horse, one bound as if in the act of rising to a fence, landed the docile creature's fore-feet upon the crown or arching centre of the road. The larger half of the little equipage had then cleared our over-towering shadow: *that* was evident even to my own agitated sight. But it mattered little that one wreck should float off in safety, if upon the wreck that perished were embarked the human freightage. The rear part of the carriage—was *that* certainly beyond the line of absolute ruin? What power could answer the question? Glance of eye, thought of man, wing of angel, which of these had speed enough to sweep between the question and the answer, and divide the one from the other? Light does not tread upon the steps of light more indivisibly than did our all-conquering arrival upon the escaping efforts of the gig. *That* must the young man have felt too plainly. His back was now turned to us; not by sight could he any longer communicate with the peril; but by the dreadful rattle of our harness, too truly had his ear been instructed—that all was finished as regarded any further effort of *his*. Already in resignation he had rested from his

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

struggle ; and perhaps in his heart he was whispering, " Father, which art in heaven, do Thou finish above what I on earth have attempted." Faster than ever mill-race we ran past them in our inexorable flight. Oh, raving of hurricanes that must have sounded in their young ears at the moment of our transit ! Even in that moment the thunder of collision spoke aloud. Either with the swingle-bar, or with the haunch of our near leader, we had struck the off-wheel of the little gig, which stood rather obliquely, and not quite so far advanced, as to be accurately parallel with the near-wheel. The blow, from the fury of our passage, resounded terrifically. I rose in horror, to gaze upon the ruins we might have caused. From my elevated station I looked down, and looked back upon the scene, which in a moment told its own tale, and wrote all its records on my heart for ever.

Here was the map of the passion that now had finished. The horse was planted immovably, with his fore-feet upon the paved crest of the central road. He of the whole party might be supposed untouched by the passion of death. The little cany carriage—partly, perhaps, from the violent torsion of the wheels in its recent movement, partly from the thundering blow we had given to it—as if it sympathised with human horror, was all alive with tremblings and shiverings. The young man trembled not, nor shivered. He sat like a rock. But *his* was the steadiness of agitation frozen into rest by horror. As yet he dared not to look round ; for he knew that, if anything remained to do, by him it could no longer be done. And as yet he knew not for certain if their safety were accomplished. But the lady——

But the lady—— ! Oh, heavens ! will that spectacle ever depart from my dreams, as she rose and sank upon her seat, sank and rose, threw up

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

her arms wildly to heaven, clutched at some visionary object in the air, fainting, praying, raving, despairing? Figure to yourself, reader, the elements of the case; suffer me to recall before your mind the circumstances of that unparalleled situation. From the silence and deep peace of this saintly summer night—from the pathetic blending of this sweet moonlight, dawnlight, dreamlight—from the manly tenderness of this flattering, whispering, murmuring love—suddenly as from the woods and fields—suddenly as from the chambers of the air opening in revelation—suddenly as from the ground yawning at her feet, leaped upon her, with the flashing of cataracts, Death the crowned phantom, with all the equipage of his terrors, and the tiger roar of his voice.

The moments were numbered, the strife was finished; the vision was closed. In the twinkling of an eye, our flying horses had carried us to the termination of the umbrageous aisle; at right angles we wheeled into our former direction; the turn of the road carried the scene out of my eyes in an instant, and swept it into my dreams for ever.

Section III

DREAM-FUGUE

Founded on the preceding Theme of Sudden Death

Whence the sound
Of instruments, that made melodious chime,
Was heard, of harp and organ, and who moved
Their stops and chords, was seen, his volant touch,
Instinct through all proportions, low and high,
Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue.

Paradise Lost, Book XI

Tumultuosissimamente

Passion of sudden death! that once in youth I
read and interpreted by the shadows of thy averted

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

signs !—rapture of panic taking the shape (which amongst tombs in churches I have seen) of woman bursting her sepulchral bonds—of woman's Ionic form bending forward from the ruins of her grave with arching foot, with eyes upraised, with clasped adoring hands—waiting, watching, trembling, praying for the trumpet's call to rise from dust for ever ! Ah, vision too fearful of shuddering humanity on the brink of almighty abysses !—vision that didst start back, that didst reel away, like a shrivelling scroll from before the wrath of fire racing on the wings of the wind ! Epilepsy so brief of horror, wherefore is it that thou canst not die ? Passing so suddenly into darkness, wherefore is it that still thou sheddest thy sad funeral blights upon the gorgeous mosaics of dreams ? Fragment of music too passionate, heard once, and heard no more, what aileth thee, that thy deep rolling chords come up at intervals through all the worlds of sleep, and after forty years, have lost no element of horror ?

I

Lo, it is summer—almighty summer ! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown open wide ; and on the ocean, tranquil and verdant as a savannah, the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating—she upon a fairy pinnacle, and I upon an English three-decker. Both of us are wooing gales of festal happiness within the domain of our common country, within that ancient watery park, within that pathless chase of ocean, where England takes her pleasure as a huntress through winter and summer, from the rising to the setting sun. Ah, what a wilderness of floral beauty was hidden, or was suddenly revealed, upon the tropic islands through which the pinnacle moved ! And upon her deck what a

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

bevy of human flowers—young women how lovely, young men how noble, that were dancing together, and slowly drifting towards *us* amidst music and incense, amidst blossoms from forests and gorgeous corymbi from vintages, amidst natural carolling, and the echoes of sweet girlish laughter. Slowly the pinnacle nears us, gaily she hails us, and silently she disappears beneath the shadow of our mighty bows. But then, as at some signal from heaven, the music, and the carols, and the sweet echoing of girlish laughter—all are hushed. What evil has smitten the pinnacle, meeting or overtaking her? Did ruin to our friends couch within our own dreadful shadow? Was our shadow the shadow of death? I looked over the bow for an answer, and, behold! the pinnacle was dismantled; the revel and the revellers were found no more; the glory of the vintage was dust; and the forests with their beauty were left without a witness upon the seas. “But where,” and I turned to our crew—“where are the lovely women that danced beneath the awning of flowers and clustering corymbi? Whither have fled the noble young men that danced with *them*?” Answer there was none. But suddenly the man at the mast-head, whose countenance darkened with alarm, cried out, “Sail on the weather beam! Down she comes upon us: in seventy seconds she also will founder.”

II

I looked to the weather side, and the summer had departed. The sea was rocking, and^o shaken with gathering wrath. Upon its surface sat mighty mists, which grouped themselves into arches and long cathedral aisles. Down one of these, with the fiery pace of a quarrel from a cross-bow, ran a frigate right athwart our course. “Are they mad?”

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

some voice exclaimed from our deck. "Do they woo their ruin?" But in a moment, as she was close upon us, some impulse of a heady current or local vortex gave a wheeling bias to her course, and off she forged without a shock. As she ran past us, high aloft amongst the shrouds stood the lady of the pinnacle. The deeps opened ahead in malice to receive her, towering surges of foam ran after her, the billows were fierce to catch her. But far away she was borne into desert spaces of the sea; whilst still by sight I followed her, as she ran before the howling gale, chased by angry sea-birds and by maddening billows; still I saw her, as at the moment when she ran past us, standing amongst the shrouds, with her white draperies streaming before the wind. There she stood, with hair dishevelled, one hand clutched amongst the tackling—rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying—there for leagues I saw her as she stood, raising at intervals one hand to heaven, amidst the fiery crests of the pursuing waves and the raving of the storm; until at last, upon a sound from afar of malicious laughter and mockery, all was hidden for ever in driving showers; and afterwards, but when I know not, nor how . . .

III

Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance, wailing over the dead that die before the dawn, awakened me as I slept in a boat moored to some familiar shore. The morning twilight even then was breaking; and, by the dusky revelations which it spread, I saw a girl, adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival, running along the solitary strand in extremity of haste. Her running was the running of panic; and often she looked back as to some

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

dreadful enemy in the rear. But when I leaped ashore, and followed on her steps to warn her of a peril in front, alas! from me she fled as from another peril, and vainly I shouted to her of quicksands that lay ahead. Faster and faster she ran; round a promontory of rocks she wheeled out of sight; in an instant I also wheeled round it, but only to see the treacherous sands gathering above her head. Already her person was buried; only the fair young head and the diadem of white roses around it were still visible to the pitying heavens; and, last of all, was visible, one white marble arm. I saw by the early twilight this fair young head, as it was sinking down to darkness—saw this marble arm, as it rose above her head and her treacherous grave, tossing, faltering, rising, clutching, as at some false deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds—saw this marble arm uttering her dying hope, and then uttering her dying despair. The head, the diadem, the arm—these all had sunk; at last over these also the cruel quicksand had closed; and no memorial of the fair young girl remained on earth, except my own solitary tears, and the funeral bells from the desert seas, that, rising again more softly, sang a requiem over the grave of the buried child, and over her blighted dawn.

I sat, and wept in secret the tears that men have ever given to the memory of those that died before the dawn, and by the treachery of earth, our mother. But suddenly the tears and funeral bells were hushed by a shout as of many nations, and by a roar from some great king's artillery, advancing rapidly along the valleys, and heard afar by echoes from the mountains. "Hush!" I said, as I bent my ear earthwards to listen—"hush!—this either is the very anarchy of strife, or else"—and then I listened more profoundly, and whispered as I raised my

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

head—"or else, oh heavens! it is *victory* that is final, victory that swallows up all strife."

IV

Immediately, in trance, I was carried over land and sea to some distant kingdom, and placed upon a triumphal car, amongst companions crowned with laurel. The darkness of gathering midnight, brooding over all the land, hid from us the mighty crowds that were weaving restlessly about ourselves as a centre: we heard them, but saw them not. Tidings had arrived, within an hour, of a grandeur that measured itself against centuries; too full of pathos they were, too full of joy, to utter themselves by other language than by tears, by restless anthems, and *Te Deums* reverberated from the choirs and orchestras of earth. These tidings we that sat upon the laurelled car had it for our privilege to publish amongst all nations. And already, by signs audible through the darkness, by snortings and tramlings, our angry horses, that knew no fear of fleshly weariness, upbraided us with delay. Wherefore *was* it that we delayed? We waited for a secret word, that should bear witness to the hope of nations, as now accomplished for ever. At midnight the secret word arrived; which word was—Waterloo and Recovered Christendom! The dreadful word shone by its own light; before us it went; high above our leaders' heads it rode, and spread a golden light over the paths which we traversed. Every city, at the presence of the secret word, threw open its gates. The rivers were conscious as we crossed. All the forests, as we ran along their margins, shivered in homage to the secret word. And the darkness comprehended it.

Two hours after midnight we approached a

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

mighty Minster. Its gates, which rose to the clouds, were closed. But when the dreadful word, that rode before us, reached them with its golden light, silently they moved back upon their hinges ; and at a flying gallop our equipage entered the grand aisle of the cathedral. Headlong was our pace ; and at every altar, in the little chapels and oratories to the right hand and left of our course, the lamps, dying or sickening, kindled anew in sympathy with the secret word that was flying past. Forty leagues we might have run in the cathedral, and as yet no strength of morning light had reached us, when before us we saw the aerial galleries of organ and choir. Every pinnacle of the fretwork, every station of advantage amongst the traceries, was crested by white-robed choristers, that sang deliverance ; that wept no more tears, as once their fathers had wept ; but at intervals that sang together to the generations, saying,

Chant the deliverer's praise in every tongue,

and receiving answers from afar,

Such as once in heaven and earth were sung

And of their chanting was no end ; of our headlong pace was neither pause nor slackening.

Thus, as we ran like torrents—thus, as we swept with bridal rapture over the Campo Santo of the cathedral graves—suddenly we became aware of a vast necropolis rising upon the far-off horizon—a city of sepulchres, built within the saintly cathedral for the warrior dead that rested from their feuds on earth. Of purple granite was the necropolis ; yet, in the first minute, it lay like a purple stain upon the horizon, so mighty was the distance. In the second minute it trembled through many changes, growing into terraces and towers of wondrous altitude, so mighty was the pace. In

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the third minute already, with our dreadful gallop, we were entering its suburbs. Vast sarcophagi rose on every side, having towers and turrets that, upon the limits of the central aisle, strode forward with haughty intrusion, that ran back with mighty shadows into answering recesses. Every sarcophagus showed many bas-reliefs—bas-reliefs of battles and of battle-fields; battles from forgotten ages—battles from yesterday—battle-fields that, long since, nature had healed and reconciled to herself with the sweet oblivion of flowers—battle-fields that were yet angry and crimson with carnage. Where the terraces ran, there did *we* run; where the towers curved, there did *we* curve. With the flight of swallows our horses swept round every angle. Like rivers in flood, wheeling round headlands—like hurricanes that ride into the secrets of forests—faster than ever light unwove the mazes of darkness, our flying equipage carried earthly passions, kindled warrior instincts, amongst the dust that lay around us—dust oftentimes of our noble fathers that had slept in God from Créci to Trafalgar. And now had we reached the last sarcophagus, now were we abreast of the last bas-relief, already had we recovered the arrow-like flight of the illimitable central aisle, when coming up this aisle to meet us we beheld afar off a female child, that rode in a carriage as frail as flowers. The mists, which went before her, hid the fawns that drew her, but could not hide the shells and tropic flowers with which she played—but could not hide the lovely smiles by which she uttered her trust in the mighty cathedral, and in the cherubim that looked down upon her from the mighty shafts of its pillars. Face to face she was meeting us; face to face she rode, as if danger there were none. “Oh, baby!” I exclaimed, “shalt thou be the ransom for Waterloo? Must

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

we, that carry tidings of great joy to every people, be messengers of ruin to thee ! ” In horror I rose at the thought ; but then also, in horror at the thought, rose one that was sculptured on a bas-relief—a Dying Trumpeter. Solemnly from the field of battle he rose to his feet ; and, unslinging his stony trumpet, carried it, in his dying anguish, to his stony lips—sounding once, and yet once again ; proclamation that, in *thy* ears, oh baby ! spoke from the battlements of death. Immediately deep shadows fell between us, and aboriginal silence. The choir had ceased to sing. The hoofs of our horses, the dreadful rattle of our harness, the groaning of our wheels, alarmed the graves no more. By horror the bas-relief had been unlocked unto life. By horror we, that were so full of life, we men and our horses, with their fiery fore-legs rising in mid air to their everlasting gallop, were frozen to a bas-relief. Then a third time the trumpet sounded ; the seals were taken off all pulses ; life, and the frenzy of life, tore into their channels again ; again the choir burst forth in sunny grandeur, as from the muffling of storms and darkness ; again the thunderings of our horses carried temptation into the graves. One cry burst from our lips, as the clouds, drawing off from the aisle, showed it empty before us—“ Whither has the infant fled ?—is the young child caught up to God ? ” Lo ! afar off, in a vast recess, rose three mighty windows to the clouds ; and on a level with their summits, at height insuperable to man, rose an altar of purest alabaster. On its eastern face was trembling a crimson glory. A glory was it from the reddening dawn that now streamed *through* the windows ? Was it from the crimson robes of the martyrs painted *on* the windows ? Was it from the bloody bas-reliefs of earth ? There, suddenly, within that crimson radiance, rose

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the apparition of a woman's head, and then of a woman's figure. The child it was—grown up to woman's height. Clinging to the horns of the altar, voiceless she stood—sinking, rising, raving, despairing; and behind the volume of incense, that, night and day, streamed upwards from the altar, dimly was seen the fiery font, and the shadow of that dreadful being who should have baptized her with the baptism of death. But by her side was kneeling her better angel, that hid his face with wings; that wept and pleaded for *her*; that prayed when *she* could *not*; that fought with Heaven by tears for *her* deliverance; which also, as he raised his immortal countenance from his wings, I saw, by the glory in his eye, that from Heaven he had won at last.

V

Then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue. The golden tubes of the organ, which as yet had but muttered at intervals—gleaming amongst clouds and surges of incense—threw up, as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music. Choir and anti-choir were filling fast with unknown voices. Thou also, Dying Trumpeter!—with thy love that was victorious, and thy anguish that was finishing—didst enter the tumult; trumpet and echo—farewell love, and farewell anguish—rang through the dreadful *sanctus*. Oh, darkness of the grave! that from the crimson altar and from the fiery font wert visited and searched by the effulgence in the angel's eye—were these indeed* thy children? Poms of life, that, from the burials of centuries, rose again to the voice of perfect joy, did ye indeed mingle with the festivals of Death? Lo! as I looked back for seventy leagues through the mighty cathedral, I saw the

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

quick and the dead that sang together to God, together that sang to the generations of man. All the hosts of jubilation, like armies that ride in pursuit, moved with one step. Us, that, with laurelled heads, were passing from the cathedral, they overtook, and, as with a garment, they wrapped us round with thunders greater than our own. As brothers we moved together; to the dawn that advanced—to the stars that fled, rendering thanks to God in the highest—that, having hid His face through one generation behind thick clouds of War; once again was ascending—from the Campo Santo of Waterloo was ascending—in the visions of Peace; rendering thanks for thee, young girl! whom, having overshadowed with His ineffable passion of death, suddenly did God relent; suffered thy angel to turn aside His arm, and even in thee, sister unknown! shown to me for a moment only to be hidden for ever, found an occasion to glorify His goodness. A thousand times, amongst the phantoms of sleep, have I seen thee entering the gates of the golden dawn—with the secret word riding before thee—with the armies of the grave behind thee; seen thee sinking, rising, raving, despairing; a thousand times in the worlds of sleep have seen thee followed by God's angel through storms; through desert seas; through the darkness of quicksands! through dreams, and the dreadful revelations that are in dreams—only that at the last, with one sling of His victorious arm, He might snatch thee back from ruin, and might emblazon in thy deliverance the endless resurrections of His love!

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

The Pleasures of Opium

IT is very long since I first took opium ; so long, that if it had been a trifling incident in my life, I might have forgotten its date ; but cardinal events are not to be forgotten ; and, from circumstances connected with it, I remember that this inauguration into the use of opium must be referred to the spring or to the autumn of 1804 ; during which seasons I was in London, having come thither for the first time since my entrance at Oxford. And this event arose in the following way : from an early age I had been accustomed to wash my head in cold water at least once a day ; being suddenly seized with toothache, I attributed it to some relaxation caused by a casual intermission of that practice ; jumped out of bed, plunged my head into a basin of cold water, and with hair thus wetted went to sleep. The next morning, as I need hardly say, I awoke with excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face, from which I had hardly any respite for about twenty days. On the twenty-first day I think it was, and on a Sunday, that I went out into the streets ; rather to run away, if possible, from my torments, than with any distinct purpose of relief. By accident, I met a college acquaintance, who recommended opium. Opium ! dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain ! I had heard of it as I had heard of mānna or of ambrosia, but no further. How unmeaning a sound was opium at that time ! what solemn chords does it now strike upon my heart ! what heart-quaking vibrations of sad and happy remembrances ! Reverting for a moment to these, I feel a mystic importance attached to the minutest circumstances connected with the place, and the time, and the man (if man he was), that first laid open to me the paradise of opium-eaters. It was a Sunday

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

afternoon, wet and cheerless ; and a duller spectacle this earth of ours has not to show than a rainy Sunday in London. My road homewards lay through Oxford Street ; and near "the *stately* Pantheon" (as Mr Wordsworth has obligingly called it) I saw a druggist's shop. The druggist (unconscious minister of celestial pleasures !), as if in sympathy with the rainy Sūndāy, looked dull and stupid, just as any mortal druggist might be expected to look on a rainy London Sunday ; and when I asked for the tincture of opium, he gave it to me as any other man might do ; and, furthermore, out of my shilling returned to me what seemed to be real copper halfpence, taken out of a real wooden drawer. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all such indications of humanity, he has ever since figured in my mind as a beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself. And it confirms me in this way of considering him that, when I next came up to London, I sought him near the stately Pantheon, and found him not ; and thus to me, who knew not his name (if, indeed, he had one), he seemed rather to have vanished from Oxford Street than to have flitted into any other locality, or (which some abominable man suggested) to have absconded from the rent. The reader may choose to think of him as, possibly, no more than a *subūnary* druggist ; it may be so, but my faith is better. I believe him to have evanesced. So unwillingly would I connect any mortal remembrances with that hour, and place, and creature that first brought me acquainted with the celestial drug.

Arrived at my lodgings, it may be supposed that I lost not a moment in taking the quantity prescribed. I was necessarily ignorant of the whole art and mystery of opium-taking ; and what I took I took under every disadvantage. But I took it ; and in an hour, O heavens ! what a revulsion ! what

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

a resurrection, from its lowest depths of the inner spirit ! what an apocalypse of the world within me. That my pains had vanished was now a trifle in my eyes ; this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me, in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea, a *φάρμακον νηπενθές*, for all human woes ; here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered ; happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat-pocket ; portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint-bottle ; and peace of mind could be sent down by the mail.

And, first, one word with respect to its bodily effects ; for upon all that has been hitherto written on the subject of opium, whether by travellers in Turkey (who may plead their privilege of lying as an old immemorial right), or by professors of medicine writing *ex cathedra*, I have but one emphatic criticism to pronounce—Nonsense ! I remember once, in passing a book-stall, to have caught these words from a page of some satiric author—“ By this time I became convinced that the London newspapers spoke truth at least twice a week—viz., on Tuesday and Saturday—and might safely be depended upon for—the list of bankrupts.” In like manner, I do by no means deny that some truths have been delivered to the world in regard to opium : thus, it has been repeatedly affirmed by the learned that opium is a tawny brown in colour—and this, take notice, I grant ; secondly, that it is rather dear, which also I grant—for, in my time, East-India opium has been three guineas a pound, and Turkey eight ; and, thirdly, that, if you eat a good deal of it, most probably you must do what is disagreeable to any man of regular habits—viz., die. These weighty propositions are, all and singular, true ; I

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

cannot gainsay them ; and truth ever was, and will be, commendable. But, in these three theorems, I believe we have exhausted the stock of knowledge as yet accumulated by man on the subject of opium. And therefore, worthy doctors, as there seems to be room for further discoveries, stand aside, and allow me to come forward and lecture on this matter.

First, then, it is not so much affirmed as taken for granted by all who ever mention opium, formally or incidentally, that it does or can produce intoxication. Now, reader, assure yourself, *meo periculo*, that no quantity of opium ever did, or could, intoxicate. As to the tincture of opium (commonly called laudanum), *that* might certainly intoxicate, if a man could bear to take enough of it ; but why ? Because it contains so much proof spirits of wine, and not because it contains so much opium. But crude opium, I affirm peremptorily, is incapable of producing any state of body at all resembling that which is produced by alcohol ; and not in *degree* only incapable, but even in *kind* ; it is not in the quantity of its effects merely, but in the quality, that it differs altogether. The pleasure given by wine is always rapidly mounting, and tending to a crisis, after which as rapidly it declines ; that from opium, when once generated, is stationary for eight or ten hours : the first, to borrow a technical distinction from medicine, is a case of acute, the second of chronic, pleasure ; the one is a flickering flame, the other a steady and equable glow. But the main distinction lies in this—that whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary (if taken in a proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony. Wine robs a man of his self-possession ; opium sustains and reinforces it. Wine unsettles the judgment, and gives a preternatural brightness and a vivid exaltation to the

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

contempts and the admirations, to the loves and the hatreds, of the drinker ; opium, on the contrary, communicates serenity and equipoise to all the faculties, active or passive ; and, with respect to the temper and moral feelings in general, it gives simply that sort of vital warmth which is approved by the judgment, and which would probably always accompany a bodily constitution of primeval or antediluvian health. Thus, for instance, opium, like wine, gives an expansion to the heart and the benevolent affections ; but, then, with this remarkable difference, that, in the sudden development of kind-heartedness which accompanies inebriation, there is always more or less of a maudlin and a transitory character, which exposes it to the contempt of the bystander. Men shake hands, swear eternal friendship, and shed tears—no mortal knows why ; and the animal nature is clearly uppermost. But the expansion of the benigner feelings incident to opium is no febrile access, no fugitive paroxysm ; it is a healthy restoration to that state which the mind would naturally recover upon the removal of any deep-seated irritation from pain that had disturbed and quarrelled with the impulses of a heart originally just and good. True it is, that even wine up to a certain point, and with certain men, rather tends to exalt and to steady the intellect. I myself, ~~who~~ have never been a great wine-drinker, used to find that half-a-dozen glasses of wine advantageously affected the faculties, brightened and intensified the consciousness, and gave to the mind a feeling of being *ponderibus librata suis* ; and certainly it is most absurdly said, in popular language, of any man, that he is *disguised* in liquor ; for, on the contrary, most men are disguised by sobriety, and exceedingly disguised ; and it is when they are drinking that men display themselves in their true

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

complexion of character ; which surely is not disguising themselves. But still, wine constantly leads a man to the brink of absurdity and extravagance ; and, beyond a certain point, it is sure to volatilise and to disperse the intellectual energies ; whereas opium always seems to compose what had been agitated, and to concentrate what had been distracted. In short, to sum up all in one word, a man who is inebriated, or tending to inebriation, is, and feels that he is, in a condition which calls up into supremacy the merely human, too often the brutal, part of his nature ; but the opium-eater (I speak of him simply *as* such, and assume that he is in a normal state of health) feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount—that is, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity ; and high over all the great light of the majestic intellect.

This is the doctrine of the true church on the subject of opium : of which church I acknowledge myself to be the Pope (consequently infallible), and self-appointed *legate a latere* to all degrees of latitude and longitude. But then it is to be recollected that I speak from the ground of a large and profound personal experience, whereas most of the unscientific authors who have at all treated of opium, and even of those who have written professionally on the *materia medica*, make it evident, by the horror they express of it, that their experimental knowledge of its action is none at all. I will, however, candidly acknowledge that I have met with one person who bore evidence to its intoxicating power, such as staggered my own incredulity ; for he was a surgeon, and had himself taken opium largely for a most miserable affection (past all hope of cure) seated in one particular organ. This affection was a subtle inflammation, not acute, but chronic ; and with this he fought for more (I believe) than twenty years ; fought

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

victoriously, if victory it were, to make life supportable for himself, and during all that time to maintain in respectability a wife and a family of children altogether dependent on him. I happened to say to him, that his enemies (as I had heard) charged him with talking nonsense on politics, and that his friends apologised for him, by suggesting that he was constantly in a state of intoxication from opium. Now, the accusation, said I, is not *prima facie* an absurd one; but the defence *is*. To my surprise, however, he insisted that both his enemies and his friends were in the right. "I will maintain," said he, "that I *do* talk nonsense; and, secondly, I will maintain that I do not talk nonsense upon principle, or with any view to profit, but solely and simply," said he—"solely and simply—solely and simply" (repeating it three times over) "because I am drunk with opium; and that daily." I replied, that as to the allegation of his enemies, as it seemed to be established upon such respectable testimony, seeing that the three parties concerned all agreed so far, it did not become me to question it; but the defence set up I must demur to. He proceeded to discuss the matter, and to lay down his reasons; but it seemed to me so impolite to pursue an argument which must have presumed a man mistaken in a point belonging to his own profession, that I did not press him, even when his course of argument seemed open to objection; not to mention that a man who talks nonsense, even though "with no view to profit," is not altogether the most agreeable respondent in a dispute. I confess, however, that the authority of a surgeon, and one who was reputed a good one, may seem a weighty one to my prejudice; but still I must plead my experience, which was greater than his greatest by more than seven thousand drops a-day; and though it was not possible to suppose a medical

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

man unacquainted with the characteristic symptoms of vinous intoxication, yet it struck me that he might proceed on a logical error of using the word intoxication with too careless a latitude, extending generically to all modes of nervous excitement, instead of restricting it to one special quality of pleasurable elevation, distinguished by well-known symptoms, and connected with tendencies not to be evaded. Two of these tendencies I will mention as diagnostic, or characteristic and inseparable marks of ordinary alcoholic intoxication, but which no excess in the use of opium ever develops. One is the loss of self-command, in relation to all one's acts and purposes, which steals gradually (though with varying degrees of speed) over *all* persons indiscriminately when indulging in wine or distilled liquors beyond a certain limit. The tongue and other organs become unmanageable: the intoxicated man speaks inarticulately; and, with regard to certain words, makes efforts ludicrously earnest, yet oftentimes unavailing, to utter them. The eyes are bewildered, and see double; grasping too little, and too much. The hand aims awry. The legs stumble, and lose their power of *concurrent* action. To this result *all* people tend, though by varying rates of acceleration. Secondly, as another characteristic, it may be noticed that, in alcoholic intoxication, the movement is always along a kind of arch; the drinker rises through continual ascents to a summit or *apex*, from which he descends through corresponding steps of declension. There is a crowning point in the movement upwards, which once attained cannot be renewed: and it is the blind, unconscious, but always unsuccessful effort of the obstinate drinker to restore this supreme altitude of enjoyment which tempts him into excesses that become dangerous. After reaching this *acme* of genial pleasure, it is a mere necessity of the

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

case to sink through corresponding stages of collapse. Some people have maintained, in my hearing, that they had been drunk upon green tea ; and a medical student in London, for whose knowledge in his profession I have reason to feel great respect, assured me, the other day, that a patient, in recovering from an illness, had got drunk on a beef-steak. All turns, in fact, upon a rigorous definition of intoxication.

Having dwelt so much on this first and leading error in respect to opium, I shall notice briefly a second and a third ; which are, that the elevation of spirits produced by opium is necessarily followed by a proportionate depression, and that the natural and even immediate consequence of opium is torpor and stagnation, animal as well as mental. The first of these errors I shall content myself with simply denying ; assuring my reader, that for ten years during which I took opium not regularly, but intermittingly, the day succeeding to that on which I allowed myself this luxury was always a day of unusually good spirits.

With respect to the torpor supposed to follow, or rather (if we were to credit the numerous pictures of Turkish opium-eaters) to accompany, the practice of opium-eating, I deny that also. Certainly, opium is classed under the head of narcotics, and some such effect it may produce in the end ; but the primary effects of opium are always, and in the highest degree, to excite and stimulate the system. This first stage of its action always lasted with me, during my novitiate, for upwards of eight hours ; so that it must be the fault of the opium-eater himself, if he does not so time his exhibition of the dose, as that the whole weight of its narcotic influence may descend upon his sleep. Turkish opium-eaters, it seems, are absurd enough to sit, like so many equestrian

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

statues, on logs of wood as stupid as themselves. But, that the reader may judge of the degree in which opium is likely to stupefy the faculties of an Englishman, I shall (by way of treating the question illustratively, rather than argumentatively) describe the way in which I myself often passed an opium evening in London during the period between 1804 and 1812. It will be seen, that at least opium did not move me to seek solitude, and much less to seek inactivity, or the torpid state of self-involution ascribed to the Turks. I give this account at the risk of being pronounced a crazy enthusiast or visionary ; but I regard that little. I must desire my reader to bear in mind that I was a hard student, and at severe studies for all the rest of my time ; and certainly I had a right occasionally to relaxations as well as other people.

The late Duke of Norfolk used to say, "Next Monday, wind and weather permitting, I purpose to be drunk"; and in like manner I used to fix beforehand how often within a given time, when, and with what accessory circumstances of festal joy, I would commit a debauch of opium. This was seldom more than once in three weeks ; for at that time I could not have ventured to call every day (as afterwards I did), for "*a glass of laudanum negus, warm, and without sugar.*" No ; once in three weeks sufficed ; and the time selected was either a Tuesday or a Saturday night ; my reason for which was this :—Tuesday and Saturday were for many years the regular nights of performance at the King's Theatre (or Opera-House) ; and there it was in those times that Crassini sang ; and her voice (the richest of *contraltos*) was delightful to me beyond all that I had ever heard. Yes ; or have since heard ; or ever shall hear. I know not what may be the state of the opera-house now, having never been within its walls for seven or eight years ; but

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

at that time it was by much the most pleasant place of resort in London for passing an evening. Half-a-guinea admitted you to the pit, under the troublesome condition, however, of being *en grande tenue*. But to the gallery five shillings admitted you; and that gallery was subject to far less annoyance than the pit of most theatres. The orchestra was distinguished by its sweet and melodious grandeur from all English orchestras; the composition of which, I confess, is not acceptable to my ear, from the predominance of the clangorous instruments, and in some instances from the tyranny of the violin. Thrilling was the pleasure with which almost always I heard this angelic Grassini. Shivering with expectation I sat, when the time drew near for her golden epiphany; shivering I rose from my seat, incapable of rest, when that heavenly and harp-like voice sang its own victorious welcome in its prelude *threttánelo—threttánelo* (*θρεττάνελω—θρεττάνελω*). The choruses were divine to hear; and, when Grassini appeared in some interlude, as she often did, and poured forth her passionate soul as Andromache at the tomb of Hector, etc., I question whether any Turk, of all that ever entered the paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had. But, indeed, I honour the barbarians too much by supposing them capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual *ὄνec* of an Englishman. For music is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it. And, by-the-by, with the exception of the fine extravaganzas on that subject in *Twelfth Night*, I do not recollect more than one thing said adequately on the subject of music in all literature. It is a passage in the *Religio Medici* of Sir T. Browne; and, though chiefly remarkable for its sublimity, has also a philosophic value, inasmuch as it points to the true theory of musical

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

effects. The mistake of most people is, to suppose that it is by the ear they communicate with music, and therefore that they are purely passive as to its effects. But this is not so ; it is by the reaction of the mind upon the notices of the ear (the *matter* coming by the senses, the *form* from the mind) that the pleasure is constructed ; and therefore it is that people of equally good ear differ so much in this point from one another. Now opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind, generally increases, of necessity, that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure. But, says a friend, a succession of musical sounds is to me like a collection of Arabic characters : I can attach no ideas to them. Ideas ! my dear friend ! there is no occasion for them ; all that class of ideas which can be available in such a case has a language of representative feelings. But this is a subject foreign to my present purposes ; it is sufficient to say that a chorus, etc., of elaborate harmony displayed before me, as in a piece of arras-work, the whole of my past life—not as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music ; no longer painful to dwell upon, but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction, and its passions exalted, spiritualised, and sublimed. All this was to be had for five shillings—that being the price of admission to the gallery ; or, if a man preferred the high-bred society of the pit, even this might be had for half-a-guinea ; or, in fact, for half-a-crown less, by purchasing beforehand a ticket at the music shops. And over and above the music of the stage and the orchestra, I had all around me, in the intervals of the performance, the music of the Italian language talked by Italian women—for the gallery was usually crowded with Italians—and I listened

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

with a pleasure such as that which Weld, the traveller, lay and listened, in Canada, to the sweet laughter of Indian women; for the less you understand of a language, the more sensible you are to the melody or harshness of its sounds. For such a purpose, therefore, it was an advantage to me that in those days I was a poor Italian scholar, reading it but little, and not speaking it at all, nor understanding a tenth part of what I heard spoken.

These were my opera pleasures; but another pleasure I had, which, as it could be had only on a Saturday night, occasionally struggled with my love of the opera; for, in those years, Tuesday and Saturday were the regular opera nights. On this subject I am afraid I shall be rather obscure, but, I can assure the reader, not at all more so than Marinus in his *Life of Proclus*, or many other biographers and autobiographers of fair reputation. This pleasure, I have said, was to be had only on a Saturday night. What then, was Saturday night to me more than any other night? I had no labours that I rested from; no wages to receive; what needed I to care for Saturday night, more than as it was a summons to hear Grassini? True, most logical reader; what thou sayest is, and ever will be, unanswerable. And yet so it was, that, whereas different men throw their feelings into different channels, and most men are apt to show their interest in the concerns of the poor chiefly by sympathy with their distresses and sorrows, I at that time was disposed to express mine by sympathising with their pleasures. The pains of poverty I had lately seen too much of—more than I wished to remember; but the pleasures of the poor, their hopes, their consolations of spirit, and their restings from toil, can never become oppressive to contemplate. Now, Saturday night is the season for the chief regular and periodic return of rest to the poor,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and to all that live by bodily labour ; in this point the most hostile sects unite, and acknowledge a common link of brotherhood : almost all Christendom rests from its labours. It is a rest introductory to another rest ; and divided by a whole day and two nights from the renewal of toil. On this account I feel always, on a Saturday night, as though I also were released from some yoke of bondage, had some wages to receive, and some luxury of repose to enjoy. For the sake, therefore, of witnessing, upon as large a scale as possible, a spectacle with which my sympathy was so entire, I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, whither the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages. Many a family party, consisting of a man, his wife, and sometimes one or two of their children, have I listened to, as they stood consulting on their ways and means, or the strength of their exchequer, or the price of household articles. Gradually I became familiar with their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions. Sometimes there might be heard murmurs of discontent ; but far oftener expressions on the countenance, or uttered in words, of patience, of hope, and of reconciliation to their lot. Generally speaking, the impression left upon my mind was, that the poor are practically more philosophic than the rich ; that they show a more ready and cheerful submission to what they consider as irremediable evils or irreparable losses. Whenever I saw occasion, or could do it without appearing to be intrusive, I joined their parties, and gave my opinion upon the matter in discussion, which, if not always judicious, was always received indulgently. If wages were a little higher, or were expected to be so—if the quartern loaf were a little lower, or it was re-

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

ported that onions and butter were falling, I was glad ; yet, if the contrary were true, I drew from opium some means of consolation. For opium (like the bee, that extracts its materials indiscriminately from roses and from the soot of chimneys) can overrule all feelings into a compliance with the master-key. Some of these rambles led me to great distances ; for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes, in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, alleys without soundings, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without obvious outlets or thoroughfares, as must baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney coachmen. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terra incognita*, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. Positively, in one line of communication to the south of Holborn, for foot passengers (known, I doubt not, to many of my London readers), the road lay through a man's kitchen ; and, as it was a small kitchen, you needed to steer cautiously, or else you might run foul of the dripping-pan. For all this, however, I paid a heavy price in distant years, when the human face tyrannised over my dreams, and the perplexities of my steps in London came back and haunted my sleep, with the feeling of perplexities, moral or intellectual, that brought confusion to the reason, that brought anguish and remorse to the conscience.

Thus I have shown, or tried to show, that opium does not of necessity produce inactivity or torpor ;

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

but that, on the contrary, it often led me into markets and theatres. Yet, in candour, I will admit that markets and theatres are not the appropriate haunts of the opium-eater, when in the divinest state incident to his enjoyment. In that state, crowds become an oppression to him ; music, even, too sensual and gross. He naturally seeks solitude and silence, as indispensable conditions of these trances, or profoundest reveries, which are the crown and consummation of what opium can do for human nature. I, whose disease it was to meditate too much and to observe too little, and who, upon my first entrance at college, was nearly falling into a deep melancholy, from brooding too much on the sufferings which I had witnessed in London, was sufficiently aware of these tendencies in my own thoughts to do all I could to counteract them. I was, indeed, like a person, who, according to the old Pagan legend, had entered the cave of Trophonius ; and the remedies I sought were to force myself into society, and to keep my understanding in continual activity upon subtleties of philosophic speculation. But for these remedies, I should certainly have become hypochondriacally melancholy. In after years, however, when my cheerfulness was more fully re-established, I yielded to my natural inclination for a solitary life. At that time I often fell into such reveries after taking opium ; and many a time it has happened to me on a summer night—when I have been seated at an open window, from which I could overlook the sea at a mile below me, and could at the same time command a view of some great town standing on a different radius of my circular prospect, but at nearly the same distance—that from sunset to sunrise, all through the hours of night, I have continued motionless, as if frozen, without consciousness of myself as of an object anywise distinct from the multifarious scene

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

which I contemplated from above. Such a scene in all its elements was not unfrequently realised for me on the gentle eminence of Everton. Obliquely to the left lay the many-linguaged town of Liverpool; obliquely to the right, the multitudinous sea. The scene itself was somewhat typical of what took place in such a reverie. The town of Liverpool represented the earth, with its sorrows and its graves left behind, yet not out of sight, nor wholly forgotten. The ocean, in everlasting but gentle agitation, yet brooded over by dove-like calm, might not unfitly typify the mind, and the mood which then swayed it. For it seemed to me as if then first I stood at a distance aloof from the uproar of life; as if the tumult, the fever, and the strife, were suspended; a respite were granted from the secret burdens of the heart; some sabbath of repose; some resting from human labours. Here were the hopes which blossom in the paths of life, reconciled with the peace which is in the grave; motions of the intellect as unwearied as the heavens, yet for all anxieties a halcyon calm; tranquillity that seemed no product of inertia, but as if resulting from mighty and equal antagonisms; infinite activities, infinite repose.

O just, subtle, and all-conquering opium! that, to the hearts of rich and poor alike, for the wounds that will never heal, and for the pangs of grief that "tempt the spirit to rebel," bringest an assuaging balm;—eloquent opium! that with thy potent rhetoric stealest away the purposes of wrath, pleadest effectually for relenting pity, and through one night's heavenly sleep callest back to the guilty man the visions of his infancy, and hands washed pure from blood;—O just and righteous opium! that to the chancery of dreams summonest, for the triumphs of despairing innocence, false witnesses; and confoundest perjury; and dost reverse the

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

sentences of unrighteous judges ;—thou buldest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles—beyond the splendours of Babylon and Hekatompylos ; and, “from the anarchy of dreaming sleep,” callest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties, and the blessed household countenances, cleansed from the “dishonours of the grave.” Thou only givest these gifts to man ; and thou hast the keys of Paradise, O just, subtle, and mighty opium !

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

The Pains of Opium

MY studies have now been long interrupted. I cannot read to myself with any pleasure, hardly with a moment's endurance. Yet I sometimes read aloud for the pleasure of others; because reading is an accomplishment of mine, and, in the slang use of the word *accomplishment* as a superficial and ornamental attainment, almost the only one I possess; and formerly, if I had any vanity at all connected with any endowment or attainment of mine, it was with this; for I had observed that no accomplishment is more rare. Actors are the worst readers of all. John Kemble is not effective as a reader, though he has the great advantage of mature scholarship; and his sister, the immortal Siddons, with all her superiority to him in voice, reads even less effectively. She reads nothing well but dramatic works. In the *Paradise Lost*, which I heard her attempt at Barley Wood, her failure was distressing; almost as distressing as the sycophantic applause of the surrounding company—all lost, of course, in nearly speechless admiration. Yet I am sensible that this contemptuous feeling for the circle of admirers is scarcely justified. What *should* the poor creatures have done? Already, in the mere attempt to win their suffrages, in placing herself once again upon trial, there was a condescension on the part of Mrs Siddons, after which free judgment became impossible. I felt a wish to address Mrs Siddons thus—You that have read to royalty at Windsor, nay, have even been desired to *sit down* at Windsor whilst reading, ever afterwards are a privileged person, liable to no accout of truth. Our feelings, as not free to take any natural expression, can be of no value. Suffer us to be silent, if only for the dignity of

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

human nature. 'And do yourself be silent, if only for the dignity of that once unequalled voice. Neither Coleridge nor Southey is a good reader of verse. Southey is admirable almost in all things, but not in this. Both he and Coleridge read as if crying, or at least wailing lugubriously. People in general either read poetry without any passion at all, or else overstep the modesty of nature. Of late, if I have felt moved by anything in books, it has been by the grand lamentations of *Samson Agonistes*, or the great harmonies of the Satanic speeches in *Paradise Regained*, when read aloud by myself. We are far from towns; but a young lady sometimes comes and drinks tea with us; at her request and M——'s, I now and then read Wordsworth's poems to them. (Wordsworth, by-the-by, is the only poet I ever met who could read his own verses; often, indeed, he reads admirably.)

For nearly two years I believe that I read nothing and studied nothing. Analytic studies are continuous studies, and not to be pursued by fits and starts, or fragmentary efforts. All these were become insupportable to me; I shrank from them with a sense of powerless and infantine feebleness that gave me an anguish the greater from remembering the time when I grappled with them to my own hourly delight; and for this further reason, because I had devoted the labours of my whole life, had dedicated my intellect, blossoms and fruits, to the slow and elaborate toil of constructing one single work, to which I had presumed to give the title of an unfinished work of Spinoza's—viz., *De Emendatione Humani Intellectus*. This was now lying locked up as by frost, like any Spanish bridge or aqueduct begun upon too great a scale for the resources of the architect; and, instead of surviving me, as a monument of wishes at least, and aspirations, and long labours, dedicated to the exaltation

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

of human nature in that way in which God had best fitted me to promote so great an object, it was likely to stand a memorial to my children of hopes defeated, of baffled efforts, of materials uselessly accumulated, of foundations laid that were never to support a superstructure, of the grief and the ruin of the architect. In this state of imbecility, I had, for amusement, turned my attention to political economy ; my understanding, which formerly had been as active and restless as a panther, could not, I suppose (so long as I lived at all), sink into utter lethargy ; and political economy offers this advantage to a person in my state, that, though it is eminently an organic science (no part, that is to say, but what acts on the whole, as the whole again reacts on and through each part), yet still the several parts may be detached and contemplated singly. Great as was the prostration of my powers at this time, yet I could not forget my knowledge ; and my understanding had been for too many years intimate with severe thinkers, with logic, and the great masters of knowledge, not to be aware of a great call made by political economy at this crisis for a new law and a transcendent legislator. Suddenly, in 1818, a friend in Edinburgh sent me down Mr Ricardo's book ; and, recurring to my own prophetic anticipation of some coming legislator for this science, I said, before I had finished the first chapter, "Thou art the man !" Wonder and curiosity were emotions that had long been dead in me. Yet I wondered once more—wondered at myself that could once again be stimulated to the effort of reading ; and much more I wondered at the book. Had this profound work been really written during the tumultuous hurry of the nineteenth century ? Could it be that an Englishman, and he not in academic bowers, but oppressed by mercantile and senatorial cares, had accomplished

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

what all the universities of Europe, and a century of thought, had failed even to advance by one hair's-breadth? Previous writers had been crushed and overlaid by the enormous weights of facts, details, and exceptions; Mr Ricardo had deduced, *a priori*, from the understanding itself, laws which first shot arrowy light into the dark chaos of materials, and had thus constructed what hitherto was but a collection of tentative discussions into a science of regular proportions, now first standing upon an eternal basis.

Thus did one simple work of a profound understanding avail to give me a pleasure and an activity which I had not known for years; it roused me even to write, or, at least, to dictate what M—— wrote for me. It seemed to me that some important truths had escaped even "the inevitable eye" of Mr Ricardo; and, as these were, for the most part, of such a nature that I could express or illustrate them briefly and elegantly by algebraic symbols, the whole would have hardly reached the bulk of a pamphlet. With M—— for my amanuensis, even at this time, incapable as I was of all general exertion, I drew up, therefore, my *Prolegomena to all Future Systems of Political Economy*.

This exertion, however, was but a momentary flash, as the sequel showed. Arrangements were made at a provincial press, about eighteen miles distant, for printing it. An additional compositor was retained for some days, on this account. The work was even twice advertised; and I was, in a manner, pledged to the fulfilment of my intention. But I had a preface to write, and a dedication, which I wished to make impressive, to Mr Ricardo. I found myself quite unable to accomplish all this. The arrangements were countermanded, the compositor dismissed, and my *Prolegomena* rested peacefully by the side of its elder and more dignified brother.

THE PAINS OF OPTIUM

In thus describing and illustrating my intellectual torpor, I use terms that apply, more or less, to every part of the years during which I was under the Circean spells of opium. But for misery and suffering, I might, indeed, be said to have existed in a dormant state. I seldom could prevail on myself to write a letter ; an answer of a few words, to any that I received, was the utmost that I could accomplish ; and often *that* not until the letter had lain for weeks, or even months, on my writing-table. Without the aid of M——, my whole domestic economy, whatever became of political economy, must have gone into irretrievable confusion. I shall not afterwards allude to this part of the case ; it is one, however, which the opium-eater will find, in the end, most oppressive and tormenting, from the sense of incapacity and feebleness, from the direct embarrassments incident to the neglect or procrastination of each day's appropriate labours, and from the remorse which must often exasperate the stings of these evils to a conscientious mind. The opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities or aspirations ; he wishes and longs as earnestly as ever to realise what he believes possible, and feels to be exacted by duty ; but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of execution only, but even of proposing or willing. He lies under a world's weight of incubus and nightmare ; he lies in sight of all that he would fain perform, just as a man forcibly confined to his bed by the mortal languor of paralysis, who is compelled to witness injury or outrage offered to some object of his tenderest love :—he would lay down his life if he might but rise and walk ; but he is powerless as an infant, and cannot so much as make an effort to move.

But from this I now pass to what is the main

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

subject of these latter Confessions—to the history and journal of what took place in my dreams ; for these were the immediate and proximate cause of shadowy terrors that settled and brooded over my whole waking life.

The first notice I had of any important change going on in this part of my physical economy, was from the re-awaking of a state of eye oftentimes incident to childhood. I know not whether my reader is aware that many children have a power of painting, as it were, upon the darkness all sorts of phantoms ; in some that power is simply a mechanic affection of the eye ; others have a voluntary or semi-voluntary power to dismiss or summon such phantoms ; or, as a child once said to me, when I questioned him on this matter, "I can tell them to go, and they go ; but sometimes they come when I don't tell them to come." He had by one-half as unlimited a command over apparitions as a Roman centurion over his soldiers. In the middle of 1817 this faculty became increasingly distressing to me : at night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions moved along continually in mournful pomp ; friezes of never-ending stories, that to my feelings were as sad and solemn as stories drawn from times before Œdipus or Priam, before Tyre, before Memphis. And, concurrently with this, a corresponding change took place in my dreams ; a theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour. And the four following facts may be mentioned, as noticeable at this time :

1. That, as the creative state of the eye increased, a sympathy seemed to arise between the waking and the dreaming states of the brain in one point—that whatsoever I happened to call up and to trace by a voluntary act upon the darkness was very apt

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

to transfer itself to my dreams ; and at length I feared to exercise this faculty ; for, as Midas turned all things to gold that yet baffled his hopes and defrauded his human desires, so whatsoever things capable of being visually represented I did but think of in the darkness, immediately shaped themselves into phantoms for the eye ; and, by a process apparently no less inevitable, when thus once traced in faint and visionary colours, like writings in sympathetic ink, they were drawn out by the fierce chemistry of my dreams, into insufferable splendour that fretted my heart.

2. This and all other changes in my dreams were accompanied by deep-seated anxiety and funereal melancholy, such as are wholly incommunicable by words. I seemed every night to descend—not metaphorically, but literally to descend—into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever re-ascend. Nor did I, by waking, feel that I *had* re-ascended. Why should I dwell upon this ? For indeed the state of gloom which attended these gorgeous spectacles, amounting at last to utter darkness, as of some suicidal despondency, cannot be approached by words.

3. The sense of space, and in the end the sense of time, were both powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, etc., were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable and self-repeating infinity. This disturbed me very much less than the vast expansion of time. Sometimes I seemed to have lived for seventy or a hundred years in one night ; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience.

4. The minutest incidents of childhood, or forgotten scenes of later years, were often revived.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

I could not be said to recollect them ; for, if I had been told of them when waking, I should not have been able to acknowledge them as parts of my past experience. But placed as they were before me, in dreams like intuitions, and clothed in all their evanescent circumstances and accompanying feelings, I *recognised* them instantaneously. I was once told by a near relative of mine, that having in her childhood fallen into a river, and being on the very verge of death but for the assistance which reached her at the last critical moment, she saw in a moment her whole life, clothed in its forgotten incidents, arrayed before her as in a mirror, not successively, but simultaneously ; and she had a faculty developed as suddenly for comprehending the whole and every part. This, from some opium experiences, I can believe ; I have, indeed, seen the same thing asserted twice in modern books, and accompanied by a remark which probably is true—viz, that the dread book of account, which the Scriptures speak of, is, in fact, the mind itself of each individual. Of this, at least, I feel assured, that there is no such thing as ultimate *forgetting* ; traces once impressed upon the memory are indestructible ; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind. Accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil. But alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever ; just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day, whereas, in fact, we all know that it is the light which is drawn over them as a veil ; and that they are waiting to be revealed, whenever the obscuring daylight itself shall have withdrawn.

Having noticed these four facts as memorably distinguishing my dreams from those of health, I shall now cite a few illustrative cases ; and shall

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

then cite such others as I remember, in any order that may give them most effect as pictures to the reader.

I had been in youth, and ever since, for occasional amusement, a great reader of Livy, whom I confess that I prefer, both for style and matter, to any other of the Roman historians; and I had often felt as solemn and appalling sounds, emphatically representative of Roman majesty, the two words so often occurring in Livy, *Consul Romanus*; especially when the consul is introduced in his military character. I mean to say, that the words king, sultan, regent, etc., or any other titles of those who embody in their own persons the collective majesty of a great people, had less power over my reverential feelings. I had also, though no great reader of history, made myself critically familiar with one period of English history—viz., the period of the Parliamentary War—having been attracted by the moral grandeur of some who figured in that day, and by the interesting memoirs which survive those unquiet times. Both these parts of my lighter reading, having furnished me often with matter of reflection, now furnished me with matter for my dreams. Often I used to see, after painting upon the blank darkness a sort of rehearsal whilst waking, a crowd of ladies, and perhaps a festival and dances. And I heard it said, or I said to myself, “These are English ladies from the unhappy times of Charles I. These are the wives and daughters of those who met in peace, and sat at the same tables, and were allied by marriage or by blood; and yet, after a certain day in August 1642, never smiled upon each other again, nor met but in the field of battle; and at Marston Moor, at Newbury, or at Naseby, cut asunder all ties of love by the cruel sabre, and washed away in blood the memory of ancient

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

friendship." The ladies danced, and looked as lovely as at the court of George IV. Yet even in my dream I knew that they had been in the grave for nearly two centuries. This pageant would suddenly dissolve; and, at a clapping of hands, would be heard the heart-shaking sound of *Consul Romanus*; and immediately came "sweeping by" in gorgeous paludaments, Paullus or Marius, girt around by a company of centurions, with the crimson tunic hoisted on a spear, and followed by the *alalagmos* of the Roman legions.

Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, Coleridge, then standing by, described to me a set of plates from that artist, called his *Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever. Some of these (I describe only from memory of Coleridge's account) represented vast Gothic halls; on the floor of which stood mighty engines and machinery, wheels, cables, catapults, etc., expressive of enormous power put forth, or resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase; and upon this, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself. Follow the stairs a little farther, and you perceive them reaching an abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who should reach the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, at least you suppose that his labours must now in some way terminate. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher, on which again Piranesi is perceived, by this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Once again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight is descried; and there, again, is the delirious Piranesi, busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and the hopeless Piranesi both are lost in the

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

upper gloom of the hall. With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams. In the early stage of the malady, the splendours of my dreams were indeed chiefly architectural; and I beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as never yet was beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds. From a great modern poet I cite the part of a passage which describes, as an appearance actually beheld in the clouds, what in many of its circumstances I saw frequently in sleep :

The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,
Was of a mighty city—boldly say
A wilderness of building, sinking far
And self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth,
Far sinking into splendour without end !
Fabric it seem'd of diamond and of gold,
With alabaster domes and silver spires,
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
Uplifted, here, serene pavilions bright,
In avenues disposed, there towers begirt
With battlements that on their restless fronts
Bore stars—illumination of all gems !
By earthly nature had the effect been wrought
Upon the dark materials of the storm
Now pacified ; on them, and on the coves,
And mountain-steeps and summits, whereunto
The vapours had receded—taking there
Their station under a cerulean sky.

The sublime circumstance—"that on their *restless* fronts bore stars"—might have been copied from my own architectural dreams, so often did it occur. We hear it reported of Dryden, and in later times of Fuseli, that they ate raw meat for the sake of obtaining splendid dreams : how much better, for such a purpose, to have eaten opium, which yet I do not remember that any poet is recorded to have done, except the dramatist Shadwell ; and in ancient days, Homer is, I think, rightly reputed to have known the virtues of opium as a *φάρμακον νηπενθές*—*i.e.*, as an anodyne.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

To my architecture succeeded dreams of lakes and silvery expanses of water: these haunted me so much, that I feared lest some dropsical state or tendency of the brain might thus be making itself (to use a metaphysical word) *objective*; and that the sentient organ might be projecting itself as its own object. For two months I suffered greatly in my head—a part of my bodily structure which had hitherto been so clear from all touch or taint of weakness (physically, I mean), that I used to say of it, as the last Lord Orford said of his stomach, that it seemed likely to survive the rest of my person. Till now, I had never felt a headache even, or any the slightest pain, except rheumatic pains caused by my own folly.

The waters gradually changed their character—from translucent lakes, shining like mirrors, they became seas and oceans. And now came a tremendous change, which, unfolding itself slowly like a scroll, through many months, promised an abiding torment; and, in fact, it never left me, though recurring more or less intermittently. Hitherto the human face had often mixed in my dreams, but not despotically, nor with any special power of tormenting. But now that affection, which I have called the tyranny of the human face, began to unfold itself. Perhaps some part of my London life (the searching for Ann amongst fluctuating crowds) might be answerable for this. Be that as it may, now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal itself; the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing; faces that surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations: infinite was my agitation; my mind tossed, as it seemed, upon the billowy ocean, and weltered upon the weltering waves.

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

May 1818. The Malay has been a fearful enemy for months. Every night, through his means, I have been transported into Asiatic scenery. I know not whether others share in my feelings on this point; but I have often thought that if I were compelled to forego England, and to live in China, among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep, and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. As the cradle of the human race, if on no other ground, it would have a dim, reverential feeling connected with it. But there are other reasons. No man can pretend that the wild, barbarous, and capricious superstitions of Africa, or of savage tribes elsewhere, affect him in the way that he is affected by the ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate religions of Hindostan. The mere antiquity of Asiatic things, of their institutions, histories, above all, of their mythologies, etc., is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in the individual. A young Chinese seems to me an antediluvian man renewed. Even Englishmen, though not bred in any knowledge of such institutions, cannot but shudder at the mystic sublimity of *castes* that have flowed apart, and refused to mix, through such immemorial tracts of time; nor can any man fail to be awed by the sanctity of the Ganges, or by the very name of the Euphrates. It contributes much to these feelings that South-eastern Asia is, and has been for thousands of years, the part of the earth most swarming with human life, the great *officina gentium*. Man is a weed in those regions. The vast empires, also, into which the enormous population of Asia has always been cast give a further sublimity to the feelings associated with all oriental names or images. In China, over

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyse. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes. All this, and much more than I can say, the reader must enter into before he can comprehend the unimaginable horror which these dreams of oriental imagery and mythological tortures impressed upon me. Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sunlights, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances, that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Hindostan. From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brama through all the forests of Asia; Vishnu hated me; Seeva lay in wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. Thousands of years I lived and was buried in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with all unutterable abortions, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.

Some slight abstraction I thus attempt of my oriental dreams, which filled me always with such amazement at the monstrous scenery, that horror seemed absorbed for a while in sheer astonishment. Sooner or later came a reflux of feeling that

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

swallowed up the astonishment, and left me, not so much in terror, as in hatred and abomination of what I saw. Over every form, and threat, and punishment, and dim sightless incarceration, brooded a killing sense of eternity and infinity. Into these dreams only it was, with one or two slight exceptions, that any circumstances of physical horror entered. All before had been moral and spiritual terrors. But here the main agents were ugly birds, or snakes, or crocodiles, especially the last. The cursed crocodile became to me the object of more horror than all the rest. I was compelled to live with him; and (as was always the case in my dreams) for centuries. Sometimes I escaped, and found myself in Chinese houses. All the feet of the tables, sofas, etc., soon became instinct with life: the abominable head of the crocodile, and his leering eyes, looked out at me, multiplied into ten thousand repetitions; and I stood loathing and fascinated. So often did this hideous reptile haunt my dreams, that many times the very same dream was broken up in the very same way: I heard gentle voices speaking to me (I hear everything when I am sleeping), and instantly I awoke; it was broad noon, and my children were standing, hand in hand, at my bedside, come to show me their coloured shoes, or new frocks, or to let me see them dressed for going out. No experience was so awful to me, and at the same time so pathetic, as this abrupt translation from the darkness of the infinite to the gaudy summer air of highest noon, and from the unutterable abortions of miscreated gigantic vermin to the sight of infancy, and innocent *human* natures.

June 1819. I have had occasion to remark, at various periods of my life, that the deaths of those whom we love, and, indeed, the contemplation of death generally, is (*cæteris paribus*) more affecting in

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

summer than in any other season of the year. And the reasons are these three, I think : first, that the visible heavens in summer appear far higher, more distant, and (if such a solecism may be excused) more infinite ; the clouds by which chiefly the eye expounds the distance of the blue pavilion stretched over our heads are in summer more voluminous, more massed, and are accumulated in far grander and more towering piles ; secondly, the light and the appearances of the declining and the setting sun are much more fitted to be types and characters of the infinite ; and, thirdly (which is the main reason), the exuberant and riotous prodigality of life naturally forces the mind more powerfully upon the antagonist thought of death, and the wintry sterility of the grave. For it may be observed generally, that wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other. On these accounts it is that I find it impossible to banish the thought of death when I am walking alone in the endless days of summer ; and any particular death, if not actually more affecting, at least haunts my mind more obstinately and besiegingly, in that season. Perhaps this cause, and a slight incident which I omit, might have been the immediate occasions of the following dream, "to which, however, a predisposition must always have existed in my mind ; but, having been once roused, it never left me, and split into a thousand fantastic variations, which often suddenly re-combined ; locked back into startling unity, and restored the original dream.

I thought that it was a Sunday morning in May ; that it was Easter Sunday, and as yet very early in the morning. I was standing, as it seemed to me, at the door of my own cottage. Right before me lay the very scene which could really be commanded

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

from that situation, but exalted, as was usual, and solemnised by the power of dreams. There were the same mountains, and the same lovely valley at their feet ; but the mountains were raised to more than Alpine height, and there was interspace far larger between them of savannahs and forest lawns ; the hedges were rich with white roses ; and no living creature was to be seen, excepting that in the green churchyard there were cattle tranquilly reposing upon the verdant graves, and particularly round about the grave of a child whom I had once tenderly loved, just as I had really beheld them, a little before sunrise, in the same summer when that child died. I gazed upon the well-known scene, and I said to myself, " It yet wants much of sunrise ; and it is Easter Sunday ; and that is the day on which they celebrate the first-fruits of Resurrection. I will walk abroad ; old griefs shall be forgotten to-day : for the air is cool and still, and the hills are high, and stretch away to heaven ; and the churchyard is as verdant as the forest lawns, and the forest lawns are as quiet as the churchyard ; and with the dew I can wash the fever from my forehead ; and then I shall be unhappy no longer." I turned, as if to open my garden gate, and immediately I saw upon the left a scene far different ; but which yet the power of dreams had reconciled into harmony. The scene was an oriental one ; and there also it was Easter Sunday, and very early in the morning. And at a vast distance were visible, as a stain upon the horizon, the domes and cupolas of a great city—an image or faint abstraction, caught perhaps in childhood from some picture of Jerusalem. And not a bow-shot from me, upon a stone, shaded by Judean palms, there sat a woman ; and I looked, and it was—Ann ! She fixed her eyes upon me earnestly ; and I said to her at length, " So, then,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

I have found you at last." I waited ; but she answered me not a word. Her face was the same as when I saw it last ; the same, and yet, again, how different ! Seventeen years ago, when the lamp-light of mighty London fell upon her face, as for the last time I kissed her lips (lips, Ann, that to me were not polluted !), her eyes were streaming with tears. The tears were now no longer seen. Sometimes she seemed altered ; yet again sometimes *not* altered ; and hardly older. Her looks were tranquil, but with unusual solemnity of expression, and I now gazed upon her with some awe. Suddenly her countenance grew dim ; and, turning to the mountains, I perceived vapours rolling between us ; in a moment all had vanished ; thick darkness came on ; and in the twinkling of an eye I was far away from mountains, and by lamp-light in London, walking again with Ann—just as we had walked, when both children, eighteen years before, along the endless terraces of Oxford Street.

Then suddenly would come a dream of far different character—a tumultuous dream—commencing with a music such as now I often heard in sleep—music of preparation and of awakening suspense. The undulations of fast-gathering tumults were like the opening of the Coronation Anthem ; and, like *that*, gave the feeling of a multitudinous movement, of infinite cavalcades filing off, and the tread of innumerable armies. The morning was come of a mighty day—a day of crisis and of ultimate hope for human nature, then suffering mysterious eclipse, and labouring in some dread extremity. Somewhere, but I knew not where—somehow, but I knew not how—by some beings, but I knew not by whom—a battle, a strife, an agony, was travelling through all its stages—was evolving itself, like the catastrophe of some mighty drama, with which my sympathy was the

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

more insupportable, from deepening confusion as to its local scene, its cause, its nature, and its undecipherable issue. I (as is usual in dreams where, of necessity, we make ourselves central to every movement) had the power, and yet had not the power, to decide it. I had the power, if I could raise myself to will it; and yet again had not the power, for the weight of twenty Atlantics was upon me, or the oppression of inexpressible guilt. "Deeper than ever plummet sounded," I lay inactive. Then, like a chorus, the passion deepened. Some greater interest was at stake, some mightier cause, than ever yet the sword had pleaded, or trumpet had proclaimed. Then came sudden alarms; hurrys to and fro; trepidations of innumerable fugitives, I knew not whether from the good cause or the bad; darkness and lights; tempest and human faces; and at last, with the sense that all was lost, female forms, and the features that were worth all the world to me; and but a moment allowed—and clasped hands, with heart-breaking partings, and then—everlasting farewells! and, with a sigh such as the caves of hell sighed when the incestuous mother uttered the abhorred name of Death, the sound was reverberated—everlasting farewells! and again, and yet again reverberated—everlasting farewells!

And I awoke in struggles, and cried aloud, "I will sleep no more!"

Now, at last, I had become awestruck at the approach of sleep, under the condition of visions so afflicting, and so intensely life-like as those which persecuted my phantom-haunted brain. More and more also I felt violent palpitations in some internal region, such as are commonly, but erroneously, called palpitations of the heart—being, as I suppose, referable exclusively to derangements in the stomach. These were evidently increasing rapidly in frequency

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and in strength. Naturally, therefore, on considering how important my life had become to others besides myself, I became alarmed; and I paused seasonably; but with a difficulty that is past all description. Either way it seemed as though death had, in military language, "thrown himself astride of my path." Nothing short of mortal anguish, in a physical sense, it seemed, to wean myself from opium; yet, on the other hand, death through overwhelming nervous terrors—death by brain fever or by lunacy—seemed too certainly to besiege the alternative course. Fortunately I had still so much of firmness left as to face that choice, which, with most of instant suffering, showed in the far distance a possibility of final escape.

This possibility was realised: I *did* accomplish my escape. And the issue of that particular stage in my opium experiences (for such it was—simply a provisional stage, that paved the way subsequently for many milder stages, to which gradually my constitutional system accommodated itself) was, pretty nearly in the following words, communicated to my readers in the earliest edition of these Confessions:—

I triumphed. But infer not, reader, from this word '*triumphed*,' a condition of joy or exultation. Think of me as of one, even when four months had passed, still agitated, writhing, throbbing, palpitating, shattered; and much, perhaps, in the situation of him who has been racked, as I collect the torments of that state from the affecting account of them left by a most innocent sufferer (in the time of James I.). Meantime, I derived no benefit from any medicine whatever, except ammoniated tincture of valerian. The moral of the narrative is addressed to the opium-eater; and therefore, of necessity, limited in its application. If he is taught to fear and tremble, enough has been effected.

THE PAINS OF OPIUM

But he may say that the issue of my case is at least a proof that opium, after an eighteen years' use, and an eight years' abuse of its powers, may still be renounced; and that he may chance to bring to the task greater energy than I did, or that, with a stronger constitution, he may obtain the same results with less. This may be true; I would not presume to measure the efforts of other men by my own. Heartily I wish him more resolution; heartily I wish him an equal success. Nevertheless, I had motives external to myself which he may unfortunately want; and these supplied me with conscientious supports, such as merely selfish interests might fail in supplying to a mind debilitated by opium.

Lord Bacon conjectures that it may be as painful to be born as to die. That seems probable; and, during the whole period of diminishing the opium, I had the torments of a man passing out of one mode of existence into another, and liable to the mixed or the alternate pains of birth and death. The issue was not death, but a sort of physical regeneration; and I may add, that ever since, at intervals, I have had a restoration of more than youthful spirits.

One memorial of my former condition nevertheless remains: my dreams are not calm; the dread swell and agitation of the storm have not wholly subsided; the legions that encamped in them are drawing off, but not departed; my sleep is still tumultuous; and, like the gates of Paradise to our first parents when looking back from afar, it is still (in the tremendous line of Milton)—

With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

The Affliction of Childhood

ABOUT the close of my sixth year, suddenly the first chapter of my life came to a violent termination; that chapter which, even within the gates of recovered Paradise, might merit a remembrance. "*Life is finished!*" was the secret misgiving of my heart; for the heart of infancy is as apprehensive as that of maturest wisdom in relation to any capital wound inflicted on the happiness. "*Life is finished! Finished it is!*" was the hidden meaning that, half-unconsciously to myself, lurked within my sighs; and as bells heard from a distance on a summer evening seem charged at times with an articulate form of words, some monitory message, that rolls round unceasingly, even so for me some noiseless and subterraneous voice seemed to chant continually a secret word, made audible only to my own heart—that "now is the blossoming of life withered for ever." Not that such words formed themselves vocally within my ear, or issued audibly from my lips: but such a whisper stole silently to my heart. Yet in what sense could *that* be true? For an infant not more than six years old, was it possible that the promises of life had been really blighted? or its golden pleasures exhausted? Had I seen Rome? Had I read Milton? Had I heard Mozart? No. St Peter's, the *Paradise Lost*, the divine melodies of *Don Giovanni*, all alike were as yet unrevealed to me, and not more through the accidents of my position than through the necessity of my yet imperfect sensibilities. Raptures there might be in arrear; but raptures are modes of *troubled* pleasure. The peace, the rest, the central security which belong to love that is past all understanding—these could return no more. Such a love, so unfathomable—such a peace, so unvexed

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

by storms, or the fear of storms—had brooded over those four latter years of my infancy, which brought me into special relations to my eldest sister; she being at this period three years older than myself. The circumstances which attended the sudden dissolution of this most tender connection I will here rehearse.

The earliest incidents in my life which left stings in my memory so as to be remembered at this day were two, and both before I could have completed my second year; namely, first, a remarkable dream of terrific grandeur about a favourite nurse, which is interesting to myself for this reason—that it demonstrates my dreaming tendencies to have been constitutional, and not dependent upon laudanum; and, secondly, the fact of having connected a profound sense of pathos with the reappearance, very early in the spring, of some crocuses. This I mention as inexplicable; for such annual resurrections of plants and flowers affect us only as memorials, or suggestions of some higher change, and therefore in connection with the idea of death; yet of death I could, at that time, have had no experience whatever.

This, however, I was speedily to acquire. My two eldest sisters—eldest of three *then* living, and also elder than myself—were summoned to an early death. The first who died was Jane, about two years older than myself. She was three and a half, I one and a half, more or less by some trifle that I do not recollect. But death was then scarcely intelligible to me, and I could not so properly be said to suffer sorrow as a sad perplexity. There was another death in the house about the same time—viz., of a maternal grandmother; but, as she had come to us for the express purpose of dying in her daughter's society, and from illness had lived perfectly secluded, our nursery circle knew her but little, and were certainly more affected by the death

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

(which I witnessed) of a beautiful bird—viz., a kingfisher, which had been injured by an accident. With my sister Jane's death (though otherwise, as I have said, less sorrowful than perplexing) there was, however, connected an incident which made a most fearful impression upon myself, deepening my tendencies to thoughtfulness and abstraction beyond what would seem credible for my years. If there was one thing in this world from which, more than from any other, nature had forced me to revolt, it was brutality and violence. Now, a whisper arose in the family that a female servant, who by accident was drawn off from her proper duties to attend my sister Jane for a day or two, had on one occasion treated her harshly, if not brutally; and as this ill-treatment happened within three or four days of her death, so that the occasion of it must have been some fretfulness in the poor child caused by her sufferings, naturally there was a sense of awe and indignation diffused through the family. I believe the story never reached my mother, and possibly it was exaggerated; but upon me the effect was terrific. I did not often see the person charged with this cruelty; but, when I did, my eyes sought the ground; nor could I have borne to look her in the face; not, however, in any spirit that could be called anger. The feeling which fell upon me was a shuddering horror, as upon a first glimpse of the truth that I was in a world of evil and strife. Though born in a large town (the town of Manchester, even then among the largest of the island), I had passed the whole of my childhood, except for the few earliest weeks, in a rural seclusion. With three innocent little sisters for playmates, sleeping always amongst them, and shut up for ever in a silent garden from all knowledge of poverty, or oppression, or outrage, I had not suspected until this moment the true complexion of the world in which myself and my sisters were living.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Henceforward the character of my thoughts changed greatly ; for so *representative* are some acts, that one single case of the class is sufficient to throw open before you the whole theatre of possibilities in that direction. I never heard that the woman accused of this cruelty took it at all to heart, even after the event which so immediately succeeded had reflected upon it a more painful emphasis. But for myself, that incident had a lasting revolutionary power in colouring my estimate of life.

So passed away from earth one of those three sisters that made up my nursery playmates ; and so did my acquaintance (if such it could be called) commence with mortality. Yet, in fact I knew little more of mortality than that Jane had disappeared. She had gone away ; but, perhaps, she would come back. Happy interval of heaven-born ignorance ! Gracious immunity of infancy from sorrow disproportioned to its strength ! I was sad for Jane's absence. But still in my heart I trusted that she would come again. Summer and winter came again—crocuses and roses ; why not little Jane ?

Thus easily was healed, then, the first wound in my infant heart. Not so the second. For thou, dear, noble Elizabeth, around whose ample brow, as often as thy sweet countenance rises upon the darkness, I fancy a *tiara* of light or a gleaming *aureola* in token of thy premature intellectual grandeur—thou whose head, for its superb developments, was the astonishment of science—thou next, but after an interval of happy years, thou also wert summoned away from our nursery ; and the night which for me gathered upon that event ran after my steps far into life ; and perhaps at this day I resemble little for good or for ill that which else I should have been. Pillar of fire that didst go before me to guide and to quicken—pillar of darkness, when thy countenance was turned away to God, that didst too truly reveal

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

to my dawning fears the secret shadow of death, by what mysterious gravitation was it that *my* heart had been drawn to thine? Could a child, six years old, place any special value upon intellectual forwardness? Serene and capacious as my sister's mind appeared to me upon after review, was *that* a charm for stealing away the heart of an infant? Oh, no! I think of it *now* with interest, because it lends, in a stranger's ear, some justification to the excess of my fondness. But then it was lost upon me; or, if not lost, was perceived only through its effects. Hadst thou been an idiot, my sister, not the less I must have loved thee, having that capacious heart—overflowing, even as mine overflowed, with tenderness, strung, even as mine was strung, by the necessity of loving and being loved. This it was which crowned thee with beauty and power:

Love, the holy sense,
Best gift of God, in thee was most intense.

That lamp of Paradise was, for myself, kindled by reflection from the living light which burned so steadfastly in thee; and never but to thee, never again since *thy* departure, had I power or temptation, courage or desire, to utter the feelings which possessed me. For I was the shyest of children; and, at all stages of life, a natural sense of personal dignity held me back from exposing the least ray of feelings which I was not encouraged *wholly* to reveal.

It is needless to pursue, circumstantially, the course of that sickness which carried off my leader and companion. She (according to my recollection at this moment) was just as near to nine years as I to six. And perhaps this natural precedency in authority of years and judgment, united to the tender humility with which she declined to assert it, had been amongst the fascinations of her presence. It was upon a Sunday evening, if such conjectures can

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

be trusted, that the spark of fatal fire fell upon that train of predispositions to a brain complaint which had hitherto slumbered within her. She had been permitted to drink tea at the house of a labouring man, the father of a favourite female servant. The sun had set when she returned, in the company of this servant, through meadows reeking with exhalations after a fervent day. From that day she sickened. In such circumstances, a child, as young as myself, feels no anxieties. Looking upon medical men as people privileged, and naturally commissioned, to make war upon pain and sickness, I never had a misgiving about the result. I grieved, indeed, that my sister should lie in bed ; I grieved still more to hear her moan. But all this appeared to me no more than as a night of trouble, on which the dawn would soon arise. Oh ! moment of darkness and delirium, when the elder nurse awakened me from that delusion, and launched God's thunderbolt at my heart in the assurance that my sister *MUST* die. Rightly it is said of utter, utter misery, that it "cannot be *remembered*." Itself, as a rememberable thing, is swallowed up in its own chaos. Blank anarchy and confusion of mind fell upon me. Deaf and blind I was, as I reeled under the revelation. I wish not to recall the circumstances of that time, when *my* agony was at its height, and hers, in another sense, was approaching. Enough it is to say, that all was soon over ; and the morning of that day had at last arrived which looked down upon her innocent face, sleeping the sleep from which there is no awaking, and upon me sorrowing the sorrow for which there is no consolation.

On the day after my sister's death, whilst the sweet temple of her brain was yet unviolated by human scrutiny, I formed my own scheme for seeing her once more. Not for the world would I have made this known, nor have suffered a witness to accom-

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

pany me. I had never heard of feelings that take the name of "sentimental," nor dreamed of such a possibility. But grief, even in a child, hates the light, and shrinks from human eyes. The house was large enough to have two staircases ; and by one of these I knew that about midday, when all would be quiet (for the servants dined at one o'clock), I could steal up into her chamber. I imagine that it was about an hour after high noon when I reached the chamber door ; it was locked, but the key was not taken away. Entering, I closed the door so softly, that, although it opened upon a hall which ascended through all the storeys, no echo ran along the silent walls. Then, turning round, I sought my sister's face. But the bed had been moved, and the back was now turned towards myself. Nothing met my eyes but one large window, wide open, through which the sun of midsummer at midday was showering down torrents of splendour. The weather was dry, the sky was cloudless, the blue depths seemed the express types of infinity, and it was not possible for eye to behold, or for heart to conceive, any symbols more pathetic of life and the glory of life.

Let me pause for one instant in approaching a remembrance so affecting for my own mind, to mention that, in the *Opium Confessions*, I endeavoured to explain the reason why death, other conditions remaining the same, is more profoundly affecting in summer than in other parts of the year—so far, at least, as it is liable to any modification at all from accidents of scenery or season. The reason, as I there suggested, lies in the antagonism between the tropical redundancy of life in summer, and the frozen sterilities of the grave. The summer we see, the grave we haunt with our thoughts ; the glory is around us, the darkness is within us ; and, the two coming into collision, each exalts the other into stronger relief. But, in my case, there was even a

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

subtler reason why the summer had this intense power of vivifying the spectacle or the thoughts of death. And, recollecting it, I am struck with the truth, that far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, pass to us as *involved* (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us *directly*, and in their own abstract shapes. It had happened that amongst our vast nursery collection of books was the Bible illustrated with many pictures. And in long dark evenings, as my three sisters with myself sat by the firelight round the *guard* of our nursery, no book was so much in request among us. It ruled us and swayed us as mysteriously as music. Our younger nurse, whom we all loved, would sometimes, according to her simple powers, endeavour to explain what we found obscure. We, the children, were all constitutionally touched with pensiveness; the fitful gloom and sudden lambencies of the room by firelight suited our evening state of feelings; and they suited, also, the divine revelations of power and mysterious beauty which awed us. Above all, the story of a just man—man and yet *not* man, real above all things, and yet shadowy above all things—who had suffered the passion of death in Palestine, slept upon our minds like early dawn upon the waters. The nurse knew and explained to us the chief differences in Oriental climates; and all these differences (as it happens) express themselves, more or less, in varying relations to the great accidents and powers of summer. The cloudless sunlights of Syria—those seemed to argue everlasting summer; the disciples plucking the ears of corn—that *must* be summer; but, above all, the very name of Palm Sunday (a festival in the English Church) troubled me like an anthem. “Sunday!” what was *that*? That was the day of peace which masked another peace

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

deeper than the heart of man can comprehend. "Palms!" what were they? *That* was an equivocal word; palms, in the sense of trophies, expressed the pomps of life; palms, as a product of nature, expressed the pomps of summer. Yet still even this explanation does not suffice; it was not merely by the peace and by the summer, by the deep sound of rest below all rest and of ascending glory, that I had been haunted. It was also because Jerusalem stood near to those deep images both in time and in place. The great event of Jerusalem was at hand when Palm Sunday came; and the scene of that Sunday was near in place to Jerusalem. What then was Jerusalem? Did I fancy it to be the *omphalos* (navel) or physical centre of the earth? Why should *that* affect me? Such a pretension had once been made for Jerusalem, and once for a Grecian city; and both pretensions had become ridiculous, as the figure of the planet became known. Yes; but if not of the earth, yet of mortality, for earth's tenant, Jerusalem, had now become the *omphalos* and absolute centre. Yet how? There, on the contrary, it was, as we infants understood, that mortality had been trampled under foot. True; but, for that very reason, there it was that mortality had opened its very gloomiest crater. There it was, indeed, that the human had risen on wings from the grave; but, for that reason, there also it was that the divine had been swallowed up by the abyss; the lesser star could not rise, before the greater should submit to eclipse. Summer, therefore, had connected itself with death, not merely as a mode of antagonism, but also as a phenomenon brought into intricate relations with death by scriptural scenery and events.

Out of this digression, for the purpose of showing how inextricably my feelings and images of death were entangled with those of summer, as connected with Palestine and Jerusalem, let me come back to

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the bedchamber of my sister. From the gorgeous sunlight I turned round to the corpse. There lay the sweet childish figure ; there the angel face ; and, as people usually fancy, it was said in the house that no features had suffered any change. Had they not ? The forehead, indeed—the serene and noble forehead—*that* might be the same ; but the frozen eyelids, the darkness that seemed to steal from beneath them, the marble lips, the stiffening hands, laid palm to palm, as if repeating the supplications of closing anguish—could these be mistaken for life ? Had it been so, wherefore did I not spring to those heavenly lips with tears and never-ending kisses ? But so it was *not*. I stood checked for a moment ; awe, not fear, fell upon me ; and, whilst I stood, a solemn wind began to blow—the saddest that ear ever heard. It was a wind that might have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand centuries. Many times since, upon summer days, when the sun is about the hottest, I have remarked the same wind arising and uttering the same hollow, solemn, Memnonian, but saintly swell : it is in this world the one great audible symbol of eternity. And three times in my life have I happened to hear the same sound in the same circumstances—viz., when standing between an open window and a dead body on a summer day.

Instantly, when my ear caught this vast Æolian intonation, when my eye filled with the golden fulness of life, the pomps of the heavens above, or the glory of the flowers below, and turning when it settled upon the frost which overspread my sister's face, instantly a trance fell upon me. A vault seemed to open in the zenith of the far blue sky, a shaft which ran up for ever. I, in spirit, rose as if on billows that also ran up the shaft for ever ; and the billows seemed to pursue the throne of God ; but *that* also ran before us and fled away continually. The flight and the pursuit seemed to go on for ever and ever.

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

Frost gathering frost, some Sarsar wind of death, seemed to repel me ; some mighty relation between God and death dimly struggled to evolve itself from the dreadful antagonism between them ; shadowy meanings even yet continue to exercise and torment, in dreams, the deciphering oracle within me. I slept—for how long I cannot say ; slowly I recovered my self-possession ; and, when I woke, found myself standing, as before, close to my sister's bed.

I have reason to believe that a *very* long interval had elapsed during this wandering or suspension of my perfect mind. When I returned to myself, there was a foot (or I fancied so) on the stairs. I was alarmed ; for, if anybody had detected me, means would have been taken to prevent my coming again. Hastily, therefore, I kissed the lips that I should kiss no more, and slunk, like a guilty thing, with stealthy steps from the room. Thus perished the vision, loveliest amongst all the shows which earth has revealed to me ; thus mutilated was the parting which should have lasted for ever ; tainted thus with fear was that farewell sacred to love and grief, to perfect love and to grief that could not be healed.

O Ahasuerus, everlasting Jew ! fable or not a fable, thou, when first starting on thy endless pilgrimage of woe—thou, when first flying through the gates of Jerusalem, and vainly yearning to leave the pursuing curse behind thee—couldst not more certainly in the words of Christ have read thy doom of endless sorrow, than I when passing for ever from my sister's room. The worm was at my heart ; and, I may say, the worm that could not die. Man is doubtless *one* by some subtle *nexus*, some system of links, that we cannot perceive, extending from the new-born infant to the superannuated dotard : but, as regards many affections and passions incident to his nature at different stages, he is *not* one, but an intermitting creature, ending and beginning anew ;

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the unity of man, in this respect, is coextensive only with the particular stage to which the passion belongs. Some passions, as that of sexual love, are celestial by one half of their origin, animal and earthly by the other half. These will not survive their own appropriate stage. But love which is *altogether* holy, like that between two children, is privileged to revisit by glimpses the silence and the darkness of declining years ; and, possibly, this final experience in my sister's bedroom, or some other in which her innocence was concerned, may rise again for me to illuminate the clouds of death.

On the day following this which I have recorded, came a body of medical men to examine the brain, and the particular nature of the complaint ; for in some of its symptoms it had shown perplexing anomalies. An hour after the strangers had withdrawn, I crept again to the room ; but the door was now locked, the key had been taken away—and I was shut out for ever.

Then came the funeral. I, in the ceremonial character of *mourner*, was carried thither. I was put into a carriage with some gentlemen whom I did not know. They were kind and attentive to me ; but naturally they talked of things disconnected with the occasion, and their conversation was a torment. At the church, I was told to hold a white handkerchief to my eyes. Empty hypocrisy ! What need had *he* of masks or mockeries, whose heart died within him at every word that was uttered ? During that part of the service which passed within the church, I made an effort to attend ; but I sank back continually into my own solitary darkness, and I heard little consciously, except some fugitive strains from the sublime chapter of St Paul, which in England is always read at burials.

Lastly came that magnificent liturgical service which the English Church performs at the side of

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

the grave ; for this church does not forsake her dead as long as they continue in the upper air, but waits for her last " sweet and solemn farewell " at the side of the grave. There is exposed once again, and for the last time, the coffin. All eyes survey the record of name, of sex, of age, and the day of departure from earth—records how shadowy ! and dropped into darkness as messages addressed to worms. Almost at the very last comes the symbolic ritual, tearing and shattering the heart with volleying discharges, peal after peal, from the fine artillery of woe. The coffin is lowered into its home ; it has disappeared from all eyes but those that look down into the abyss of the grave. The sacristan stands ready, with his shovel of earth and stones. The priest's voice is heard once more—*earth to earth*—and immediately the dread rattle ascends from the lid of the coffin ; *ashes to ashes*—and again the killing sound is heard ; *dust to dust*—and the farewell volley announces that the grave, the coffin, the face are sealed up for ever and ever.

Grief ! thou art classed amongst the depressing passions. And true it is that thou humblest to the dust, but also thou exaltest to the clouds. Thou shakest as with ague, but also thou steadiest like frost. Thou sickenest the heart, but also thou healest its infirmities. Among the very foremost of mine was morbid sensibility to shame. And, ten years afterwards, I used to throw my self-reproaches with regard to that infirmity into this shape—viz., that if I were summoned to seek aid for a perishing fellow-creature, and that I could obtain that aid only by facing a vast company of critical or sneering faces, I might, perhaps, shrink basely from the duty. It is true that no such case had ever actually occurred ; so that it was a mere romance of casuistry to tax myself with cowardice so shocking. But to feel a doubt was to feel condemnation ; and the crime

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

that *might* have been, was in my eyes the crime that *had* been. Now, however, all was changed ; and, for anything which regarded my sister's memory, in one hour I received a new heart. Once in Westmoreland I saw a case resembling it. I saw a ewe suddenly put off and abjure her own nature, in a service of love—yes, slough it as completely as ever serpent sloughed his skin. Her lamb had fallen into a deep trench, from which all escape was hopeless without the aid of man. And to a man she advanced, bleating clamorously, until he followed her and rescued her beloved. Not less was the change in myself. Fifty thousand sneering faces would not have troubled me *now* in any office of tenderness to my sister's memory. Ten legions would not have repelled me from seeking her, if there had been a chance that she could be found. Mockery ! it was lost upon me. Laughter ! I valued it not. And when I was taunted insultingly with " my girlish tears," that word "*girlish*" had no sting for me, except as a verbal echo to the one eternal thought of my heart—that a girl was the sweetest thing which I, in my short life, had known—that a girl it was who had crowned the earth with beauty, and had opened to my thirst fountains of pure celestial love, from which, in this world, I was to drink no more.

Now began to unfold themselves the consolations of solifude, those consolations which only I was destined to taste ; now, therefore, began to open upon me those fascinations of solitude, which, when acting as a co-agency with unresisted grief, end in the paradoxical result of making out of grief itself a luxury ; such a luxury as finally becomes a snare, overhanging life itself, and the energies of life, with growing menaces. All deep feelings of a *chronic* class agree in this, that they seek for solitude, and are fed by solitude. Deep grief, deep love, how naturally do these ally themselves with religious feeling ! and all

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

three—love, grief, religion—are haunters of solitary places. Love, grief, and the mystery of devotion—what were these without solitude? All day long, when it was not impossible for me to do so, I sought the most silent and sequestered nooks in the grounds about the house, or in the neighbouring fields. The awful stillness oftentimes of summer noons, when no winds were abroad, the appealing silence of grey or misty afternoons—these were fascinations as of witchcraft. Into the woods, into the desert air, I gazed, as if some comfort lay hid in *them*. I wearied the heavens with my inquest of beseeching looks. Obstinate I tormented the blue depths with my scrutiny, sweeping them for ever with my eyes, and searching them for one angelic face that might, perhaps, have permission to reveal itself for a moment.

At this time, and under this impulse of rapacious grief, that grasped at what it could not obtain, the faculty of shaping images in the distance out of slight elements, and grouping them after the yearnings of the heart, grew upon me in morbid excess. And I recall at the present moment one instance of that sort, which may show how merely shadows, or a gleam of brightness, or nothing at all, could furnish a sufficient basis for this creative faculty.

On Sunday mornings I went with the rest of my family to church: it was a church on the ancient model of England, having aisles, galleries, organ, all things ancient and venerable, and the proportions majestic. Here, whilst the congregation knelt through the long litany, as often as we came to that passage, so beautiful amongst many that are so, where God is supplicated on behalf of "all sick persons and young children," and that he would "show his pity upon all prisoners and captives," I wept in secret; and raising my streaming eyes to the upper windows of the galleries, saw, on days when the sun was shining, a spectacle as affecting as ever

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

prophet can have beheld. The *sides* of the windows were rich with storied glass ; through the deep purples and crimsons streamed the golden light ; emblazonries of heavenly illumination (from the sun) mingling with the earthly emblazonries (from art and its gorgeous colouring) of what is grandest in man. *There* were the apostles that had trampled upon earth, and the glories of earth, out of celestial love to man. *There* were the martyrs that had borne witness to the truth through flames, through torments, and through armies of fierce, insulting faces. *There* were the saints who, under intolerable pangs, had glorified God by meek submission to his will. And all the time, whilst this tumult of sublime memorials held on as the deep chords from some accompaniment in the bass, I saw through the wide central field of the window, where the glass was *uncoloured*, white, fleecy clouds sailing over the azure depths of the sky ; were it but a fragment or a hint of such a cloud, immediately under the flash of my sorrow-haunted eye, it grew and shaped itself into visions of beds with white lawny curtains ; and in the beds lay sick children, dying children, that were tossing in anguish, and weeping clamorously for death. God, for some mysterious reason, could not suddenly release them from their pain ; but he suffered the beds, as it seemed, to rise slowly through the clouds ; slowly the beds ascended into the chambers of the air ; slowly also his arms descended from the heavens, that he and his young children, whom in Palestine, once and for ever, he had blessed, though they *must* pass slowly through the dreadful chasm of separation, might yet meet the sooner. These visions were self-sustained. These visions needed not that any sound should speak to me, or music mould my feelings. The hint from the litany, the fragment from the clouds—those and the storied windows were sufficient. But not the less the blare

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

of the tumultuous organ wrought its own separate creations. And oftentimes in anthems, when the mighty instrument threw its vast columns of sound, fierce yet melodious, over the voices of the choir—high in arches, when it seemed to rise, surmounting and overriding the strife of the vocal parts, and gathering by strong coercion the total storm into unity—sometimes I seemed to rise and walk triumphantly upon those clouds which, but a moment before, I had looked up to as mementos of prostrate sorrow; yes, sometimes under the transfigurations of music, felt of grief itself as of a fiery chariot for mounting victoriously above the causes of grief.

God speaks to children, also, in dreams, and by the oracles that lurk in darkness. But in solitude, above all things, when made vocal to the meditative heart by the truths and services of a national church, God holds with children "communion undisturbed." Solitude, though it may be silent as light, is, like light, the mightiest of agencies; for solitude is essential to man. All men come into this world *alone*; all leave it *alone*. Even a little child has a dread, whispering consciousness, that, if he should be summoned to travel into God's presence, no gentle nurse will be allowed to lead him by the hand, nor mother to carry him in her arms, nor little sister to share his trepidations. King and priest, warrior and maiden, philosopher and child, all must walk those mighty galleries alone. The solitude, therefore, which in this world appals or fascinates a child's heart, is but the echo of a far deeper solitude, through which already he has passed, and of another solitude, deeper still, through which he *has* to pass: reflex of one solitude—prefiguration of another.

Oh, burden of solitude, that cleavest to man through every stage of his being! in his birth, which *has* been—in his life, which *is*—in his death, which *shall* be—mighty and essential solitude! that wast

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and art, and art to be ; thou broadest, like the Spirit of God moving upon the surface of the deeps, over every heart that sleeps in the nurseries of Christendom. Like the vast laboratory of the air, which, seeming to be nothing, or less than the shadow of a shade, hides within itself the principles of all things, solitude for the meditating child is the Agrippa's mirror of the unseen universe. Deep is the solitude of millions who, with hearts welling forth love, have none to love them. Deep is the solitude of those who, under secret griefs, have none to pity them. Deep is the solitude of those who, fighting with doubts or darkness, have none to counsel them. But deeper than the deepest of these solitudes is that which broods over childhood under the passion of sorrow—bringing before it, at intervals, the final solitude which watches for it, and is waiting for it within the gates of death. Oh, mighty and essential solitude, that wast, and art, and art to be ! thy kingdom is made perfect in the grave ; but even over those that keep watch outside the grave, like myself, an infant of six years old, thou stretchest out a sceptre of fascination.

Dream-echoes of these Infant Experiences

Once again, after twelve years' interval, the nursery of my childhood expanded before me : my sister was moaning in bed ; and I was beginning to be restless with fears not intelligible to myself. Once again the elder nurse, but now dilated to colossal proportions, stood as upon some Grecian stage with her uplifted hand, and, like the superb Medea towering amongst her children in the nursery at Corinth, smote me senseless to the ground. Again I am in the chamber with my sister's corpse, again the pomps of life rise up in silence, the glory of summer, the Syrian sunlights, the frosts of death. Dream forms

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

itself mysteriously within dream; within these Oxford dreams remoulds itself continually the trance in my sister's chamber—the blue heavens, the everlasting vault, the soaring billows, the throne steeped in the thought (but not the sight) of “*Who* might sit thereon”; the flight, the pursuit, the irrecoverable steps of my return to earth. Once more the funeral procession gathers; the priest in his white surplice stands waiting with a book by the side of an open grave: the sacristan is waiting with his shovel; the coffin has sunk; the *dust to dust* has descended. Again I was in the church on a heavenly Sunday morning. The golden sunlight of God slept amongst the heads of his apostles, his martyrs, his saints; the fragment from the litany, the fragment from the clouds, awoke again the lawny beds that went up to scale the heavens—awoke again the shadowy arms that moved downwards to meet them. Once again arose the swell of the anthem, the burst of the Hallelujah chorus, the storm, the trampling movement of the choral passion, the agitation of my own trembling sympathy, the tumult of the choir, the wrath of the organ. Once more I, that wallowed in the dust, became he that rose up to the clouds. And now all was bound up into unity; the first state and the last were melted into each other as in some sunny, glorifying haze. For high in heaven hovered a gleaming host of faces, veiled with wings, around the pillows of the dying children. And such beings sympathise equally with sorrow that grovels, and with sorrow that soars. Such beings pity alike the children that are languishing in death, and the children that live only to languish in tears.

Dream-echoes Fifty Years Later

Ascend with me on this dazzling Whitsunday the Brocken of North Germany. The dawn opened in

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

cloudless beauty ; it is a dawn of bridal June ; but as the hours advanced, her youngest sister April, that sometimes cared little for racing across both frontiers of May—the rearward frontier, and the vanward frontier—frets the bridal lady's sunny temper with sallies of wheeling and careering showers, flying and pursuing, opening and closing, hiding and restoring. On such a morning, and reaching the summits of the forest-mountain about sunrise, we shall have one chance the more for seeing the famous Spectre of the Brocken. Who and what is he ? He is a solitary apparition, in the sense of loving solitude ; else he is not always solitary in his personal manifestations, but, on proper occasions, has been known to unmask a strength quite sufficient to alarm those who had been insulting him.

Now, in order to test the nature of this mysterious apparition, we will try two or three experiments upon him. What we fear, and with some reason, is, that as he lived so many ages with foul Pagan sorcerers, and witnessed so many centuries of dark idolatries, his heart may have been corrupted ; and that even now his faith may be wavering or impure. We will try.

Make the sign of the cross, and observe whether he repeats it (as on Whitsunday he surely ought to do). Look ! he *does* repeat it ; but these driving April showers perplex the images, and *that*, perhaps, it is which gives him the air of one who acts reluctantly or evasively. Now, again, the sun shines more brightly, and the showers have all swept off like squadrons of cavalry to the rear. We will try him again.

Pluck an anemone, one of these many anemones which was once called the sorcerer's flower, and bore a part, perhaps, in this horrid ritual of fear ; carry it to that stone which mimics the outline of a heathen altar, and once was called the sorcerer's altar ; then,

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

bending your knee, and raising your right hand to God, say—"Father which art in Heaven, this lovely anemone, that once glorified the worship of fear, has travelled back into Thy fold ; this altar, which once reeked with bloody rites to Cortho, has long been rebaptised into Thy holy service. The darkness is gone ; the cruelty is gone which the darkness bred ; the moans have passed away which the victims uttered ; the cloud has vanished which once sat continually upon their graves, cloud of protestation that ascended for ever to thy throne from the tears of the defenceless, and from the anger of the just. And lo ! we—I thy servant, and this dark phantom, whom for one hour on this thy festival of Pentecost I make *my* servant—render thee united worship in this thy recovered temple."

Lo ! the apparition plucks an anemone, and places it on the altar ; he also bends his knee, he also raises his right hand to God. Dumb he is ; but sometimes the dumb serve God acceptably. Yet still it occurs to you, that perhaps on this high festival of the Christian church he may have been overruled by supernatural influence into confession of his homage, having so often been made to bow and bend his knee at murderous rites. In a service of religion he may be timid. Let us try him, therefore, with an earthly passion, where he will have no bias either from favour or from fear.

If, then, once in childhood you suffered an affliction that was ineffable ; if once, when powerless to face such an enemy, you were summoned to fight with the tiger that couches within the separations of the grave—in that case, after the example of Judea, sitting under her palm-tree to weep ; but sitting with her head veiled, do you also veil your head. Many years are passed away since then ; and perhaps you were a little ignorant thing at that time, hardly above six years old. But your heart was deeper than the

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Danube ; and, as was your love, so was your grief. Many years are gone since that darkness settled on your head ; many summers, many winters ; yet still its shadows wheel round upon you at intervals, like these April showers upon this glory of bridal June. Therefore now, on this dovelike morning of Pentecost, do you veil your head like Judea in memory of that transcendent woe, and in testimony that, indeed, it surpassed all utterance of words. Immediately you see that the apparition of the Brocken veils *his* head, after the model of Judea weeping under her palm-tree, as if he also had a human heart ; and as if *he* also, in childhood, having suffered an affliction which was ineffable, wished by these mute symbols to breathe a sigh towards heaven in memory of that transcendent woe, and by way of record, though many a year after, that it was indeed unutterable by words.

*TRIAL AND DEATH OF
JOAN OF ARC*

Trial and Death of Joan of Arc

WHAT is to be thought of *her*? What is to be thought of the poor shepherd girl from the hills and forests of Lorraine, that—like the Hebrew shepherd boy from the hills and forests of Judea—rose suddenly out of the quiet, out of the safety, out of the religious inspiration, rooted in deep pastoral solitudes, to a station in the van of armies, and to the more perilous station at the right hand of kings? The Hebrew boy inaugurated his patriotic mission by an *act*, by a victorious *act*, such as no man could deny. But so did the girl of Lorraine, if we read her story as it was read by those who saw her nearest. Adverse armies bore witness to the boy as no pretender; but so they did to the gentle girl. Judged by the voices of all who saw them *from a station of good-will*, both were found true and loyal to any promises involved in their first acts. Enemies it was that made the difference between their subsequent fortunes. The boy rose to a splendour and a noonday prosperity, both personal and public, that rang through the records of his people, and became a by-word amongst his posterity for a thousand years, until the sceptre was departing from Judah. The poor, forsaken girl, on the contrary, drank not herself from that cup of rest which she had secured for France. She never sang together with the songs that rose in her native Domrémy, as echoes to the departing steps of invaders. She mingled not in the festal dances at Vaucouleurs which celebrated in rapture the redemption of France. No! for her voice was then silent; no! for her feet were dust. Pure, innocent, noble-hearted girl! whom, from earliest youth, ever I believed in as full of truth and self-sacrifice, this was amongst the strongest pledges for *thy*

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

truth, that never once—no, not for a moment of weakness—didst thou revel in the vision of coronets and honour from man. Coronets for thee! Oh no! Honours, if they come when all is over, are for those that share thy blood. Daughter of Domrémy, when the gratitude of thy king shall awaken, thou wilt be sleeping the sleep of the dead. Call her, king of France, but she will not hear thee! Cite her by thy apparitors to come and receive a robe of honour, but she will be found *en contumace*. When the thunders of universal France, as even yet may happen, shall proclaim the grandeur of the poor shepherd girl that gave up all for her country, thy ear, young shepherd girl, will have been deaf for five centuries. To suffer and to do, that was thy portion in this life; that was thy destiny; and not for a moment was it hidden from thyself. Life, thou saidst, is short; and the sleep which is in the grave is long. Let me use that life, so transitory, for the glory of those heavenly dreams destined to comfort the sleep which is so long. This pure creature—pure from every suspicion of even a visionary self-interest, even as she was pure in senses more obvious—never once did this holy child, as regarded herself, relax from her belief in the darkness that was travelling to meet her. She might not prefigure the very manner of her death; she saw not in vision, perhaps, the aerial altitude of the fiery scaffold, the spectators without end on every road pouring into Rouen as to a coronation, the surging smoke, the volleying flames, the hostile faces all around, the pitying eye that lurked but here and there, until nature and imperishable truth broke loose from artificial restraints; these might not be apparent through the mists of the hurrying future. But the voice that called her to death, *that* she heard for ever.

Great was the throne of France even in those

TRIAL AND DEATH OF JOAN OF ARC

days, and great was he that sat upon it : but well Joanna knew that not the throne, nor he that sat upon it, was for *her* ; but, on the contrary, that she was for *them* ; not she by them, but they by her, should rise from the dust. Gorgeous were the lilies of France, and for centuries had the privilege to spread their beauty over land and sea, until, in another century, the wrath of God and man combined to wither them ; but well Joanna knew, early at Domrémy she had read that bitter truth, that the lilies of France would decorate no garland for *her*. Flower nor bud, bell nor blossom, would ever bloom for *her*. . . .

But she, the child that, at nineteen, had wrought wonders so great for France, was she not elated ? Did she not lose, as men so often *have* lost, all sobriety of mind when standing upon the pinnacle of success so giddy ? Let her enemies declare. During the progress of her movement, and in the centre of ferocious struggles, she had manifested the temper of her feelings, by the pity which she had everywhere expressed for the suffering enemy. She forwarded to the English leaders a touching invitation to unite with the French, as brothers, in a common crusade against infidels, thus opening the road for a soldierly retreat. She interposed to protect the captive or the wounded—she mourned over the excesses of her countrymen—she threw herself off her horse to kneel by the dying English soldier, and to comfort him with ministrations, physical or spiritual, as his situation allowed. *Nolebat*, says the evidence, *uti ense suo, aut quemquam interficere*. She sheltered the English that invoked her aid, in her own quarters. She wept as she beheld, stretched on the field of battle, so many brave enemies that had died without confession. And, as regarded herself, her elation expressed itself thus : On the day when she had finished her

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

work, she wept; for she knew that, when her *iriumphal* task was done, her end must be approaching. Her aspirations pointed only to a place, which seemed to her more than usually full of natural piety, as one in which it would give her pleasure to die. And she uttered, between smiles and tears, as a wish that inexpressibly fascinated her heart, and yet was half-fantastic, a broken prayer that God would return her to the solitudes from which he had drawn her, and suffer her to become a shepherdess once more. It was a natural prayer, because nature has laid a necessity upon every human heart to seek for rest, and to shrink from torment. Yet, again, it was a half-fantastic prayer, because, from childhood upwards, visions that she had no power to mistrust, and the voices which sounded in her ear for ever, had long since persuaded her mind, that for *her* no such prayer could be granted. Too well she felt that her mission must be worked out to the end, and that the end was now at hand. All went wrong from this time. She herself had created the *funds* out of which the French restoration should grow; but she was not suffered to witness their development, or their prosperous application. More than one military plan was entered upon which she did not approve. But she still continued to expose her person as before. Severe wounds had not taught her caution. And at length, in a sortie from Compiègne (whether through treacherous collusion on the part of her own friends is doubtful to this day), she was made prisoner by the Burgundians, and finally surrendered to the English.

Now came her trial. This trial, moving of course under English influence, was conducted in chief by the Bishop of Beauvais. He was a Frenchman, sold to English interests, and hoping, by favour of the English leaders, to reach the highest

TRIAL AND DEATH OF JOAN OF ARC

preferment. *Bishop that art, Archbishop that shalt be, Cardinal that mayest be*, were the words that sounded continually in his ear; and doubtless a whisper of visions still higher, of a triple crown, and feet upon the necks of kings, sometimes stole into his heart. M. Michelet is anxious to keep us in mind that this bishop was but an agent of the English. True. But it does not better the case for his countrymen—that, being an accomplice in the crime, making himself the leader in the persecution against the helpless girl, he was willing to be all this in the spirit, and with the conscious vileness of a cat's-paw. Never from the foundations of the earth was there such a trial as this, if it were laid open in all its beauty of defence, and all its hellishness of attack. Oh, child of France! shepherdess, peasant girl! trodden under foot by all around thee, how I honour thy flashing intellect, quick as God's lightning, and true as God's lightning to its mark, that ran before France and laggard Europe, by many a century, confounding the malice of the ensnarer, and making dumb the oracles of falsehood! Is it not scandalous, is it not humiliating to civilisation, that, even at this day, France exhibits the horrid spectacle of judges examining the prisoner against himself; seducing him, by fraud, into treacherous conclusions against his own head; using the terrors of their power for extorting confessions from the frailty of hope; nay (which is worse), using the blandishments of condescension and snaky kindness for thawing into compliances of gratitude those whom they had failed to freeze into terror? Wicked judges! Barbarian jurisprudence! that, sitting in your own conceit on the summits of social wisdom, have yet failed to learn the first principles of criminal justice; sit ye humbly and with docility at the feet of this girl from Domrémy, that tore your webs of cruelty

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

into shreds and dust. "Would you examine me as a witness against myself?" was the question by which many times she defied their arts. Continually she showed that their interrogations were irrelevant to any business before the court, or that entered into the ridiculous charges against her. General questions were proposed to her on points of casuistical divinity; two-edged questions, which not one of themselves could have answered, without, on the one side, landing himself in heresy (as then interpreted), or, on the other, in some presumptuous expression of self-esteem. Next came a wretched Dominican, that pressed her with an objection, which, if applied to the Bible, would tax every one of its miracles with unsoundness. The monk had the excuse of never having read the Bible. M. Michelet has no such excuse; and it makes one blush for him, as a philosopher, to find him describing such an argument as "weighty," whereas it is but a varied expression of rude Mahometan metaphysics. Her answer to this, if there were room to place the whole in a clear light, was as shattering as it was rapid. Another thought to entrap her by asking what language the angelic visitors of her solitude had talked; as though heavenly counsels could want polyglot interpreters for every word, or that God needed language at all in whispering thoughts to a human heart. Then came a worse devil, who asked her whether the archangel Michael had appeared naked. Not comprehending the vile insinuation, Joanna, whose poverty suggested to her simplicity that it might be the *costliness* of suitable robes which caused the demur, asked them if they fancied God, who clothed the flowers of the valleys, unable to find raiment for his servants. The answer of Joanna moves a smile of tenderness, but the disappointment of her judges makes one laugh exultingly. Others

TRIAL AND DEATH OF JOAN OF ARC

succeeded by troops, who upbraided her with leaving her father ; as if that greater Father, whom she believed herself to have been serving, did not retain the power of dispensing with his own rules, or had not said, that for a less cause than martyrdom, man and woman should leave both father and mother.

On Easter Sunday, when the trial had been long proceeding, the poor girl fell so ill as to cause a belief that she had been poisoned. It was not poison. Nobody had any interest in hastening a death so certain. M. Michelet, whose sympathies with all feelings are so quick, that one would gladly see them always as justly directed, reads the case most truly. Joanna had a twofold malady. She was visited by a paroxysm of the complaint called *home-sickness* ; the cruel nature of her imprisonment, and its length, could not but point her solitary thoughts, in darkness and in chains (for chained she was), to Domrémy. And the season, which was the most heavenly period of the spring, added stings to this yearning. That was one of her maladies—*nostalgia*, as medicine calls it ; the other was weariness and exhaustion from daily combats with malice. She saw that everybody hated her, and thirsted for her blood ; nay, many kind-hearted creatures that would have pitied her profoundly, as regarded all political charges, had their natural feelings warped by the belief that she had dealings with fiendish powers. She knew she was to die ; that was *not* the misery ; the misery was, that this consummation could not be reached without so much intermediate strife, as if she were contending for some chance (where chance was none) of happiness, or were dreaming for a moment of escaping the inevitable. Why, then, *did* she contend ? Knowing that she would reap nothing from answering her persecutors, why did she not retire by

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

silence from the superfluous contest? It was because her quick and eager loyalty to truth would not suffer her to see it darkened by frauds, which *she* could expose, but others, even of candid listeners, perhaps, could not; it was through that imperishable grandeur of soul, which taught her to submit meekly and without a struggle to her punishment, but taught her *not* to submit—no, not for a moment—to calumny as to facts, or to misconstruction as to motives. Besides, there were secretaries all around the court taking down her words. That was meant for no good to *her*. But the end does not always correspond to the meaning. And Joanna might say to herself—these words that will be used against me to-morrow and the next day, perhaps in some nobler generation may rise again for my justification. Yes, Joanna, they *are* rising even now in Paris, and for more than justification.

Woman, sister—there are some things which you do not execute as well as your brother, man; no, nor ever will. Pardon me, if I doubt whether you will ever produce a great poet from your choirs, or a Mozart, or a Phidias, or a Michael Angelo, or a great philosopher, or a great scholar. By which last is meant—not one who depends simply on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite and electrical power of combination; bringing together from the four winds, like the angel of the resurrection, what else were dust from dead men's bones, into the unity of breathing life. If you *can* create yourselves into any of these great creators, why have you not?

Yet, sister woman, though I cannot consent to find a Mozart or a Michael Angelo in your sex, cheerfully, and with the love that burns in depths of admiration, I acknowledge that you can do one thing as well as the best of us men—a greater thing than even Milton is known to have done, or Michael Angelo—you can die grandly, and as goddesses

TRIAL AND DEATH OF JOAN OF ARC

would die, were goddesses mortal. If any distant worlds (which *may* be the case) are so far ahead of us Tellurians in optical resources, as to see distinctly through their telescopes all that we do on earth, what is the grandest sight to which we ever treat them? St Peter's at Rome, do you fancy, on Easter Sunday, or Luxor, or perhaps the Himalayas? Oh no! my friend: suggest something better; these are baubles to *them*; they see in other worlds, in their own, far better toys of the same kind. These, take my word for it, are nothing. Do you give it up? The finest thing, then, we have to show them is a scaffold on the morning of execution. I assure you there is a strong muster in those far telescopic worlds, on any such morning, of those who happen to find themselves occupying the right hemisphere for a peep at *us*. How, then, if it be announced in some such telescopic world by those who make a livelihood of catching glimpses at our newspapers, whose language they have long since deciphered, that the poor victim in the morning's sacrifice is a woman? How, if it be published in that distant world, that the sufferer wears upon her head, in the eyes of many, the garlands of martyrdom? How, if it should be some Marie Antoinette, the widowed queen, coming forward on the scaffold, and presenting to the morning air her head, turned grey by sorrow, daughter of Cæsars kneeling down humbly to kiss the guillotine, as one that worships death? How, if it were the noble Charlotte Corday, that in the bloom of youth, that with the loveliest of persons, that with homage waiting upon her smiles wherever she turned her face to scatter *them*—homage that followed those smiles as surely as the carols of birds, after showers in spring, follow the re-appearing sun and the racing of sunbeams over the hills—yet thought all these things cheaper than the

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

dust upon her sandals, in comparison of deliverance from hell for her dear suffering France! Ah! these were spectacles indeed for those sympathising people in distant worlds; and some, perhaps, would suffer a sort of martyrdom themselves, because they could not testify their wrath, could not bear witness to the strength of love and to the fury of hatred that burned within them at such scenes; could not gather into golden urns some of that glorious dust which rested in the catacombs of earth. . . .

Bishop of Beauvais! thy victim died in fire upon a scaffold—thou upon a down bed. But for the departing minutes of life, both are oftentimes alike. At the farewell crisis, when the gates of death are opening, and flesh is resting from its struggles, oftentimes the tortured and the torturer have the same truce from carnal torment; both sink together into sleep; together both sometimes kindle into dreams. When the mortal mists were gathering fast upon you two, bishop and shepherd girl—when the pavilions of life were closing up their shadowy curtains about you—let us try, through the gigantic glooms, to decipher the flying features of your separate visions.

The shepherd girl that had delivered France—she, from her dungeon, she, from her baiting at the stake, she, from her duel with fire, as she entered her last dream—saw Domrémy, saw the fountain of Domrémy, saw the pomp of forests in which her childhood had wandered. That Easter festival, which man had denied to her languishing heart—that resurrection of springtime, which the darkness of dungeons had intercepted from *her*, hungering after the glorious liberty of forests—were by God given back into her hands, as jewels that had been stolen from her by robbers. With those, perhaps (for the minutes of dreams can stretch into ages),

TRIAL AND DEATH OF JOAN OF ARC

was given back to her by God the bliss of childhood. By special privilege, for *her* might be created in this farewell dream, a second childhood, innocent as the first ; but not, like *that*, sad with the gloom of a fearful mission in the rear. This mission had now been fulfilled. The storm was weathered, the skirts even of that mighty storm were drawing off. The blood that she was to reckon for had been exacted ; the tears that she was to shed in secret had been paid to the last.

Bishop of Beauvais ! because the guilt-burdened man is in dreams haunted and waylaid by the most frightful of his crimes, and because upon that fluctuating mirror—rising (like the mocking mirrors of *mirage* in Arabian deserts) from the fens of death—most of all are reflected the sweet countenances which the man has laid in ruins ; therefore I know, bishop, that you also, entering your final dream, saw Domrémy. That fountain, of which the witnesses spoke so much, showed itself to your eyes in pure morning dews : but neither dews, nor the holy dawn, could cleanse away the bright spots of innocent blood upon its surface. By the fountain, bishop, you saw a woman seated, that hid her face. But as *you* draw near, the woman raises her wasted features. Would Domrémy know them again for the features of her child ? Ah, but *you* know them, bishop, well ! Oh, mercy ! what a groan was *that* which the servants, waiting outside the bishop's dream at his bedside, heard from his labouring heart, as at this moment he turned away from the fountain and the woman, seeking rest in the forests afar off. Yet not *so* to escape the woman, whom once again he must behold before he dies. In the forests to which he prays for pity, will he find a respite ? What a tumult, what a gathering of feet is there ! In glades, where only wild deer should run, armies and nations are

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

assembling ; towering in the fluctuating crowd are phantoms that belong to departed hours. There is the great English Prince, Regent of France. There is my Lord of Winchester, the princely cardinal, that died and made no sign. There is the Bishop of Beauvais, clinging to the shelter of thickets. What building is that which hands so rapid are raising ? Is it a martyr's scaffold ? Will they burn the child of Domrémy a second time ? No : it is a tribunal that rises to the clouds ; and two nations stand around it, waiting for a trial. Shall my Lord of Beauvais sit again upon the judgment-seat, and again number the hours for the innocent ? Ah no ! he is the prisoner at the bar. Already all is waiting : the mighty audience is gathered, the court is hurrying to their seats, the witnesses are arrayed, the trumpets are sounding, the judge is taking his place Oh ! but this is sudden. My lord, have you no counsel ? " Counsel I have none : in heaven above, or on earth beneath, counsellor there is none now that would take a brief from *me* : all are silent." Is it, indeed, come to this ? Alas ! the time is short, the tumult is wondrous, the crowd stretches away into infinity, but yet I will search in it for somebody to take your brief : I know of somebody that will be your counsel. Who is this that cometh from Domrémy ? Who is she in bloody coronation robes from Rheims ? Who is she that cometh with blackened flesh from walking the furnaces of Rouen ? This is she, the shepherd girl, counsellor that had none for herself, whom I choose, bishop, for yours. She it is, I engage, that shall take my lord's brief. She it is, bishop, that would plead for you : yes, bishop, SHE—when heaven and earth are silent.

THE DAUGHTER OF LEBANON



The Daughter of Lebanon

DAMASCUS, first-born of cities, *Om el Denia*, mother of generations, that wast before Abraham, that wast before the Pyramids ! what sounds are those that, from a postern gate, looking eastwards over secret paths that wind away to the far distant desert, break the solemn silence of an Oriental night ? Whose voice is that which calls upon the spearmen, keeping watch for ever in the turret surmounting the gate, to receive him back into his Syrian home ? Thou knowest him, Damascus, and hast known him in seasons of trouble as one learned in the afflictions of man ; wise alike to take counsel for the suffering spirit or for the suffering body. The voice that breaks upon the night is the voice of a great evangelist—one of the four ; and he is also a great physician. This do the watchmen at the gate thankfully acknowledge, and joyfully they give him entrance. His sandals are white with dust ; for he has been roaming for weeks beyond the desert, under the guidance of Arabs, on missions of hopeful benignity to Palmyra ; and in spirit he is weary of all things, except faithfulness to God, and burning love to man.

Eastern cities are asleep betimes ; and sounds few or none fretted the quiet of all around him, as the evangelist paced onward to the market-place ; but there another scene awaited him. On the right hand, in an upper chamber, with lattices widely expanded, sat a festal company of youths, revelling under a noonday blaze of light from cressets and from bright tripods that burned fragrant woods—all joining in choral songs, all crowned with odorous wreaths from Daphne and the banks of the Orontes. Them the evangelist heeded not ; but far away upon

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the left, close upon a sheltered nook, lighted up by a solitary vase of iron fretwork filled with cedar boughs, and hoisted high upon a spear, behold there sat a woman of loveliness so transcendent that, when suddenly revealed, as now, out of deepest darkness, she appalled men as a mockery, or a birth of the air. Was she born of woman? Was it perhaps the angel—so the evangelist argued with himself—that met him in the desert after sunset, and strengthened him by secret talk? The evangelist went up, and touched her forehead; and, when he found that was indeed human, and guessed, from the station which she had chosen, that she waited for some one amongst this dissolute crew as her companion, he groaned heavily in spirit, and said, half to himself, but half to her, “Wert thou, poor ruined flower, adorned so divinely at thy birth—glorified in such excess that not Solomon in all his pomp—no, nor even the lilies of the field—can approach thy gifts—only that thou shouldest grieve the Holy Spirit of God?” The woman trembled exceedingly, and said, “Rabbi, what should I do? For behold! all men forsake me.” The evangelist mused a little, and then secretly to himself he said, “Now will I search this woman’s heart—whether in very truth it inclineth itself to God, and hath strayed only before fiery compulsion.” Turning therefore to the woman, the Prophet said, “Listen: I am the messenger of him whom thou hast not known; of him that made Lebanon and the cedars of Lebanon; that made the sea, and the heavens, and the host of the stars; that made the light; that made the darkness; that blew the spirit of life into the nostrils of man. His messenger I am; and from him all power is given me to bind and to loose, to build and to pull down. Ask, therefore, whatsoever thou wilt—great or small—and through me thou shalt receive it from God.

THE DAUGHTER OF LEBANON

But, my child, ask not amiss. For God is able out of thy own evil asking to weave snares for thy footing. And oftentimes to the lambs whom he loves he gives by seeming to refuse ; gives in some better sense, or ” (and his voice swelled into the power of anthems) “ in some far happier world. Now, therefore, my daughter, be wise on thy own behalf ; and say what it is that I shall ask for thee from God.” But the daughter of Lebanon needed not his caution ; for immediately, dropping on one knee to God’s ambassador, whilst the full radiance from the cedar torch fell upon the glory of a penitential eye, she raised her clasped hands in supplication, and said, in answer to the evangelist asking for a second time what gift he should call down upon her from heaven, “ Lord, that thou wouldest put me back into my father’s house.” And the evangelist, because he was human, dropped a tear as he stooped to kiss her forehead, saying, “ Daughter, thy prayer is heard in heaven ; and I tell thee that the daylight shall not come and go for thirty times, not for the thirtieth time shall the sun drop behind Lebanon, before I will put thee back into thy father’s house.”

Thus the lovely lady came into the guardianship of the evangelist. She sought not to varnish her history, or to palliate her own transgressions. In so far as she had offended at all, her case was that of millions in every generation. Her father was a prince in Lebanon, proud, unforgiving, austere. The wrongs done to his daughter by her dishonourable lover, because done under favour of opportunities created by her confidence in his integrity, her father persisted in resenting as wrongs done by this injured daughter herself ; and, refusing to her all protection, drove her, whilst yet confessedly innocent, into criminal compliances under sudden necessities of seeking daily bread from her

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

own uninstructed efforts. Great was the wrong she suffered both from father and lover ; great was the retribution. She lost a churlish father and a wicked lover ; she gained an apostolic guardian. She lost a princely station in Lebanon ; she gained an early heritage in heaven. For this heritage is hers within thirty days, if she will not defeat it herself. And, whilst the stealthy motion of time travelled towards this thirtieth day, behold ! a burning fever desolated Damascus, which also laid its arrest upon the Daughter of Lebanon, yet gently, and so that hardly for an hour did it withdraw her from the heavenly teachings of the evangelist. And thus daily the doubt was strengthened—would the holy apostle suddenly touch her with his hand, and say, “Woman, be thou whole !” or would he present her on the thirtieth day as a pure bride to Christ ? But perfect freedom belongs to Christian service, and she only must make the election.

Up rose the sun on the thirtieth morning in all his pomp, but suddenly was darkened by driving storms. Not until noon was the heavenly orb again revealed ; then the glorious light was again unmasked, and again the Syrian valleys rejoiced. This was the hour already appointed for the baptism of the new Christian daughter. Heaven and earth shed gratulation on the happy festival ; and, when all was finished, under an awning raised above the level roof of her dwelling-house, the regenerate Daughter of Lebanon, looking over the rose-gardens of Damascus, with amplest prospect of her native hills, lay in blissful trance, making proclamation, by her white baptismal robes, of recovered innocence and of reconciliation with God. And, when the sun was declining to the west, the evangelist, who had sat from noon by the bedside of his spiritual daughter, rose solemnly, and said, “Lady of Lebanon, the day is already come, and the hour

THE DAUGHTER OF LEBANON

is coming, in which my covenant must be fulfilled with thee. Wilt thou, therefore, being now wiser in thy thoughts, suffer God thy new Father to give by seeming to refuse ; to give in some better sense, or in some far happier world ? ” But the Daughter of Lebanon sorrowed at these words ; she yearned after her native hills ; not for themselves, but because there it was that she had left that sweet twin-born sister with whom from infant days hand-in-hand she had wandered amongst the everlasting cedars. And again the evangelist sat down by her bedside ; whilst she by intervals communed with him, and by intervals slept gently under the oppression of her fever. But, as evening drew nearer, and it wanted now but a brief space to the going down of the sun, once again, and with deeper solemnity, the evangelist rose to his feet, and said, “ O daughter ! this is the thirtieth day, and the sun is drawing near to his rest ; brief, therefore, is the time within which I must fulfil the word that God spoke to thee by me.” Then, because light clouds of delirium were playing about her brain, he raised his pastoral staff, and, pointing it to her temples, rebuked the clouds, and bade that no more they should trouble her vision, or stand between her and the forests of Lebanon. And the delirious clouds parted asunder, breaking away to the right and to the left. But upon the forests of Lebanon there hung a mighty mass of overshadowing vapours, bequeathed by the morning’s storm. And a second time the evangelist raised his pastoral staff, and, pointing it to the gloomy vapours, rebuked them, and bade that no more they should stand between his daughter and her father’s house. And immediately the dark vapours broke away from Lebanon to the right and to the left ; and the farewell radiance of the sun lighted up all the paths that ran between the everlasting cedars and her

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

father's palace. But vainly the lady of Lebanon searched every path with her eyes for memorials of her sister. And the evangelist, pitying her sorrow, turned away her eyes to the clear blue sky, which the departing vapours had exposed. And he showed her the peace which was there. And then he said, "O daughter! this also is but a mask." And immediately for the third time he raised his pastoral staff, and, pointing it to the fair blue sky, he rebuked it, and bade that no more it should stand between her and the vision of God. Immediately the blue sky parted to the right and to the left, laying bare the infinite revelations that can be made visible only to dying eyes. And the Daughter of Lebanon said to the evangelist, "O father! what armies are these that I see mustering within the infinite chasm?" And the evangelist replied, "These are the armies of Christ, and they are mustering to receive some dear human blossom, some first-fruits of Christian faith, that shall rise this night to Christ from Damascus." Suddenly, as thus the child of Lebanon gazed upon the mighty vision, she saw bending forward from the heavenly host, as if in gratulation to herself, the one countenance for which she hungered and thirsted. The twin-sister, that should have waited for her in Lebanon, had died of grief, and was waiting for her in Paradise. Immediately in rapture she soared upwards from her couch; immediately in weakness she fell back; and, being caught by the evangelist, she flung her arms around his neck; whilst he breathed into her ear his final whisper, "Wilt thou now suffer that God should give by seeming to refuse?"—"Oh, yes—yes—yes," was the fervent answer from the Daughter of Lebanon. Immediately the evangelist gave the signal to the heavens, and the heavens gave the signal to the sun; and in one minute after the Daughter of Lebanon

THE DAUGHTER OF LEBANON

had fallen back a marble corpse amongst her white baptismal robes ; the solar orb dropped behind Lebanon ; and the evangelist, with eyes glorified by mortal and immortal tears, rendered thanks to God that had thus accomplished the word which he spoke through himself to the Magdalen of Lebanon—that not for the thirtieth time should the sun go down behind her native hills before he had put her back into her Father's house.

SAVANNAH-LA-MAR

Savannah-la-mar

GOD smote Savannah-la-mar, and in one night, by earthquake, removed her, with all her towers standing and population sleeping, from the steadfast foundations of the shore to the coral floors of ocean. And God said, "Pompeii did I bury and conceal from men through seventeen centuries: this city I will bury, but not conceal. She shall be a monument to men of my mysterious anger, set in azure light through generations to come; for I will enshrine her in a crystal dome of my tropic seas." This city, therefore, like a mighty galleon with all her apparel mounted, streamers flying, and tackling perfect, seems floating along the noiseless depths of ocean; and oftentimes in glassy calms, through the translucent atmosphere of water that now stretches like an air-woven awning above the silent encampment, mariners from every clime look down into her courts and terraces, count her gates, and number the spires of her churches. She is one ample cemetery, and *has* been for many a year; but, in the mighty calms that brood for weeks over tropic latitudes, she fascinates the eye with a *Fata-Morgana* revelation, as of human life still subsisting in submarine asylums sacred from the storms that torment our upper air.

Thither, lured by the loveliness of cerulean depths, by the peace of human dwellings privileged from molestation, by the gleam of marble altars sleeping in everlasting sanctity, oftentimes in dreams did I and the Dark Interpreter cleave the watery veil that divided us from her streets. We looked into the belfries, where the pendulous bells were waiting in vain for the summons which should awaken their marriage peals; together we touched the mighty organ-keys, that sang no *jubilates* for

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the ear of heaven, that sang no requiems for the ear of human sorrow ; together we searched the silent nurseries, where the children were all asleep, and *had* been asleep through five generations. "They are waiting for the heavenly dawn," whispered the Interpreter to himself : "and, when *that* comes, the bells and the organs will utter a *jubilate* repeated by the echoes of Paradise." Then, turning to me, he said, "This is sad, this is piteous ; but less would not have sufficed for the purpose of God. Look here. Put into a Roman clepsydra one hundred drops of water ; let these run out as the sands in an hour-glass, every drop measuring the hundredth part of a second, so that each shall represent but the three-hundred-and-sixty-thousandth part of an hour. Now, count the drops as they race along ; and, when the fiftieth of the hundred is passing, behold ! forty-nine are not, because already they have perished, and fifty are not, because they are yet to come. You see, therefore, how narrow, how incalculably narrow, is the true and actual present. Of that time which we call the present, hardly a hundredth part but belongs either to a past which has fled, or to a future which is still on the wing. It has perished, or it is not born. It was, or it is not. Yet even this approximation to the truth is *infinitely* false. For again subdivide that solitary drop, which only was found to represent the present, into a lower series of similar fractions, and the actual present which you arrest measures now by the thirty-six-millionth of an hour ; and so by infinite declensions the true and very present, in which only we live and enjoy, will vanish into a mote of a mote, distinguishable only by a heavenly vision. Therefore the present, which only man possesses, offers less capacity for his footing than the slenderest film that ever spider twisted from her womb. Therefore, also, even this incalculable

SAVANNAH-LA-MAR

shadow from the narrowest pencil of moonlight is more transitory than geometry can measure, or thought of angel can overtake. The time which *is* contracts into a mathematic point; and even that point perishes a thousand times before we can utter its birth. All is finite in the present; and even that finite is infinite in its velocity of flight towards death. But in God there is nothing finite; but in God there is nothing transitory; but in God there *can* be nothing that tends to death. Therefore it follows that for God there can be no present. The future is the present of God, and to the future it is that he sacrifices the human present. Therefore it is that he works by earthquake. Therefore it is that he works by grief. O, deep is the ploughing of earthquake! O, deep"—(and his voice swelled like a *sanctus* rising from the choir of a cathedral)—"O, deep is the ploughing of grief! But oftentimes less would not suffice for the agriculture of God. Upon a night of earthquake he builds a thousand years of pleasant habitations for man. Upon the sorrow of an infant he raises oftentimes from human intellects glorious vintages that could not else have been. Less than these fierce ploughshares would not have stirred the stubborn soil. The one is needed for Earth, our planet,—for Earth itself as the dwelling-place of man; but the other is needed yet oftener for God's mightiest instrument,—yes" (and he looked solemnly at myself), "is needed for the mysterious children of the Earth!"

*LEVANA AND OUR LADIES
OF SORROW*

Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow

OF TENTIMES at Oxford I saw Levana in my dreams. I knew her by her Roman symbols. Who is Levana? Reader, that do not pretend to have leisure for very much scholarship, you will not be angry with me for telling you. Levana was the Roman goddess that performed for the newborn infant the earliest office of ennobling kindness,—typical, by its mode, of that grandeur which belongs to man everywhere, and of that benignity in powers invisible which even in Pagan worlds sometimes descends to sustain it. At the very moment of birth, just as the infant tasted for the first time the atmosphere of our troubled planet, it was laid on the ground *That* might bear different interpretations. But immediately, lest so grand a creature should grovel there for more than one instant, either the paternal hand, as proxy for the goddess Levana, or some near kinsman, as proxy for the father, raised it upright, bade it look erect as the king of all this world, and presented its forehead to the stars, saying, perhaps, in his heart, “Behold what is greater than yourselves!” This symbolic act represented the function of Levana. And that mysterious lady, who never revealed her face (except to me in dreams), but always acted by delegation, had her name from the Latin verb (as still it is the Italian verb) *levare*, to raise aloft.

This is the explanation of Levana. And hence it has arisen that some people have understood by Levana the tutelary power that controls the education of the nursery. She, that would not suffer at his birth even a prefigurative or mimic degradation for her awful ward, far less could be supposed to suffer the real degradation attaching to the non-development of his powers. She therefore watches

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

over human education. Now, the word *edūco*, with the penultimate short, was derived (by a process often exemplified in the crystallisation of languages) from the word *edūco*, with the penultimate long. Whatsoever *educes*, or develops, *educates*. By the education of Levana, therefore, is meant,—not the poor machinery that moves by spelling-books and grammars, but by that mighty system of central forces hidden in the deep bosom of human life, which by passion, by strife, by temptation, by the energies of resistance, works for ever upon children, resting not day or night, any more than the mighty wheel of day and night themselves, whose moments, like restless spokes, are glimmering for ever as they revolve.

If, then, *these* are the ministries by which Levana works, how profoundly must she reverence the agencies of grief! But you, reader, think that children generally are not liable to grief such as mine. There are two senses in the word *generally*,—the sense of Euclid, where it means *universally* (or in the whole extent of the *genus*), and a foolish sense of this world, where it means *usually*. Now, I am far from saying that children universally are capable of grief like mine. But there are more than you ever heard of who die of grief in this island of ours. I will tell you a common case. The rules of Eton require that a boy on the *foundation* should be there twelve years: he is superannuated at eighteen; consequently he must come at six. Children torn away from mothers and sisters at that age not unfrequently die. I speak of what I know. The complaint is not entered by the registrar as grief; but *that* it is. Grief of that sort, and at that age, has killed more than ever have been counted amongst its martyrs.

Therefore it is that Levana often communes with the powers that shake man's heart; therefore it is that she dotes upon grief. "These ladies," said I softly to myself, on seeing the ministers with whom

LEVANA AND OUR LADIES OF SORROW

Levana was conversing, "these are the Sorrows; and they are three in number: as the *Graces* are three, who dress man's life with beauty; the *Parcæ* are three, who weave the dark arras of man's life in their mysterious loom always with colours sad in part, sometimes angry with tragic crimson and black; the *Furies* are three, who visit with retributions called from the other side of the grave offences that walk upon this; and once even the *Muses* were but three, who fit the harp, the trumpet, or the lute, to the great burdens of man's impassioned creations. These are the Sorrows; all three of whom I know." The last words I say *now*; but in Oxford I said, "one of whom I know, and the others too surely I *shall* know." For already, in my fervent youth, I saw (dimly relieved upon the dark background of my dreams) the imperfect lineaments of the awful Sisters.

These Sisters—by what name shall we call them? If I say simply "The Sorrows," there will be a chance of mistaking the term; it might be understood of individual sorrow,—separate cases of sorrow,—whereas I want a term expressing the mighty abstractions that incarnate themselves in all individual sufferings of man's heart, and I wish to have these abstractions presented as impersonations—that is, as clothed with human attributes of life, and with functions pointing to flesh. Let us call them, therefore, *Our Ladies of Sorrow*.

I know them thoroughly, and have walked in all their kingdoms. Three Sisters they are, of one mysterious household; and their paths are wide apart; but of their dominion there is no end. Them I saw often conversing with Levana, and sometimes about myself. Do they talk, then? O no! Mighty phantoms like these disdain the infirmities of language. They may utter voices through the organs of man when they dwell in human hearts, but amongst themselves is no voice

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

nor sound ; eternal silence reigns in *their* kingdoms. They spoke not as they talked with Levana ; they whispered not ; they sang not ; though oftentimes methought they *might* have sung : for I upon earth had heard their mysteries oftentimes deciphered by harp and tumbrel, by dulcimer and organ. Like God, whose servants they are, they utter their pleasure not by sounds that perish, or by words that go astray, but by signs in heaven, by changes on earth, by pulses in secret rivers, heraldries painted on darkness, and hieroglyphics written on the tablets of the brain. *They* wheeled in mazes ; *I* spelled the steps. *They* telegraphed from afar ; *I* read the signals. *They* conspired together ; and on the mirrors of darkness *my* eye traced the plots. *Theirs* were the symbols ; *mine* are the words.

What is it the Sisters are ? What is it that they do ? Let me describe their form and their presence, if form it were that still fluctuated in its outline, or presence it were that for ever advanced to the front or for ever receded amongst shades.

The eldest of the three is named *Mater Lachrymarum*, Our Lady of Tears. She it is that night and day raves and moans, calling for vanished faces. She stood in Rama, where a voice was heard of lamentation,—Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted. She it was that stood in Bethlehem on the night when Herod's sword swept its nurseries of Innocents, and the little feet were stiffened for ever which, heard at times as they trotted along floors overhead, woke pulses of love in household hearts that were not unmarked in heaven. Her eyes are sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy, by turns ; oftentimes rising to the clouds, oftentimes challenging the heavens. She wears a diadem round her head. And I knew by childish memories that she could go abroad upon the winds, when she heard the sobbing of litanies, or the

LEVANA AND OUR LADIES OF SORROW

thundering of organs, and when she beheld the mustering of summer clouds. This Sister, the elder, it is that carries keys more than papal at her girdle, which open every cottage and every palace. She, to my knowledge, sat all last summer by the bedside of the blind beggar, him that so often and so gladly I talked with, whose pious daughter, eight years old, with the sunny countenance, resisted the temptations of play and village mirth, to travel all day long on dusty roads with her afflicted father. For this did God send her a great reward. In the spring-time of the year, and whilst yet her own spring was budding, He recalled her to himself. But her blind father mourns for ever over *her*; still he dreams at midnight that the little guiding hand is locked within his own; and still he wakens to a darkness that is *now* within a second and a deeper darkness. This *Mater Lachrymarum* also has been sitting all this winter of 1844-45 within the bed-chamber of the Czar, bringing before his eyes a daughter (not less pious) that vanished to God not less suddenly, and left behind her a darkness not less profound. By the power of the keys it is that Our Lady of Tears glides, a ghostly intruder, into the chambers of sleepless men, sleepless women, sleepless children, from Ganges to the Nile, from Nile to Mississippi. And her, because she is the first-born of her house, and has the widest empire, let us honour with the title of "Madonna."

The second Sister is called *Mater Suspiriorum*, Our Lady of Sighs. She never scales the clouds, nor walks abroad upon the winds. She wears no diadem. And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams, and with wrecks of forgotten delirium. But she raises not her eyes; her head, on which sits a dilapidated turban, droops for ever,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

for ever fastens on the dust. She weeps not. She groans not. But she sighs inaudibly at intervals. Her sister, Madonna, is oftentimes stormy and frantic, raging in the highest against heaven, and demanding back her darlings. But Our Lady of Sighs never clamours, never defies, dreams not of rebellious aspirations. She is humble to abjectness. Hers is the meekness that belongs to the hopeless. Murmur she may, but it is in her sleep. Whisper she may, but it is to herself in the twilight. Mutter she does at times, but it is in solitary places that are desolate as she is desolate, in ruined cities, and when the sun has gone down to his rest. This Sister is the visitor of the Pariah, of the Jew, of the bondsman to the oar in the Mediterranean galleys ; of the English criminal in Norfolk Island, blotted out from the books of remembrance in sweet far-off England ; of the baffled penitent reverting his eyes for ever upon a solitary grave, which to him seems the altar overthrown of some past and bloody sacrifice, on which altar no oblations can now be availing, whether towards pardon that he might implore, or towards reparation that he might attempt. Every slave that at noonday looks up to the tropical sun with timid reproach, as he points with one hand to the earth, our general mother, but for *him* a stepmother, as he points with the other hand to the Bible, our general teacher, but against *him* sealed and sequestered ; every woman sitting in darkness, without love to shelter her head, or hope to illumine her solitude, because the heaven-born instincts kindling in her nature germs of holy affections, which God implanted in her womanly bosom, *having been stifled by social necessities, now burn sullenly to waste, like sepulchral lamps amongst the ancients ; every nun defrauded of her unreturning May-time by wicked kinsman, whom God will judge ; every captive in every dungeon ;

LEVANA AND OUR LADIES OF SORROW

all that are betrayed, and all that are rejected; outcasts by traditionary law, and children of *hereditary* disgrace: all these walk with Our Lady of Sighs. She also carries a key; but she needs it little. For her kingdom is chiefly amongst the tents of Shem, and the houseless vagrant of every clime. Yet in the very highest ranks of man she finds chapels of her own; and even in glorious England there are some that, to the world, carry their heads as proudly as the reindeer, who yet secretly have received her mark upon their foreheads.

But the third Sister, who is also the youngest——! Hush! whisper whilst we talk of *her*! Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her head, turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, *might* be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden: through the treble veil of crape which she wears the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers, for noon of day or noon of night, for ebbing or for flowing tide, may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She also is the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power; but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions; in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempest from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest Sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with tiger's leaps. She carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum*—Our Lady of Darkness.

These were the *Semnai Theai* or Sublime Goddesses, these were the *Eumenides* or Gracious Ladies (so called by antiquity in shuddering propitiation) of my Oxford dreams. Madonna spoke. She spoke by her mysterious hand. Touching my head, she beckoned to Our Lady of Sighs ; and *what* she spoke, translated out of the signs which (except in dreams) no man reads, was this :

“ Lo ! here is he whom in childhood I dedicated to my altars. This is he that once I made my darling. Him I led astray, him I beguiled ; and from heaven I stole away his young heart to mine. Through me did he become idolatrous ; and through me it was, by languishing desires, that he worshipped the worm, and prayed to the wormy grave. Holy was the grave to him ; lovely was its darkness ; saintly its corruption. Him, this young idolater, I have seasoned for thee, dear gentle Sister of Sighs ! Do thou take him now to *thy* heart, and season him for our dreadful sister. And thou ”—turning to the *Mater Tenebrarum*, she said—“ wicked sister, that temptest and hatest, do thou take him from *her*. See that thy sceptre lie heavy on his head. Suffer not woman and her tenderness to sit near him in his darkness. Banish the frailties of hope ; wither the relenting of love ; scorch the fountains of tears ; curse him as only *thou* canst curse. So shall he be accomplished in the furnace ; so shall he see the things that ought *not* to be seen, sights that are abominable, and secrets that are unutterable. So shall he read elder truths, sad truths, grand truths, fearful truths. So shall he rise again *before* he dies. And so shall our commission be accomplished which from God we had—to plague his heart until we had unfolded the capacities of his spirit.”

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

The Ratcliffe Murders

BEING THE POSTSCRIPT TO THE ESSAY
“ON MURDER CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS”

NEVER, throughout the annals of universal Christendom, has there been any act of one solitary insulated individual, armed with power so appalling over the hearts of men, as that exterminating murder, by which, during the winter of 1812, John Williams, in one hour, smote two houses with emptiness, exterminated all but two entire households, and asserted his own supremacy above all the children of Cain. It would be absolutely impossible adequately to describe the frenzy of feelings which, throughout the next fortnight, mastered the popular heart; the mere delirium of indignant horror in some, the mere delirium of panic in others. For twelve succeeding days, under some groundless notion that the unknown murderer had quitted London, the panic which had convulsed the mighty metropolis diffused itself all over the island. I was myself at that time nearly three hundred miles from London; but there, and everywhere, the panic was indescribable. One lady, my next neighbour, whom personally I knew, living at the moment, during the absence of her husband, with a few servants in a very solitary house, never rested until she had placed eighteen doors (so she told me, and, indeed, satisfied me by ocular proof), each secured by ponderous bolts, and bars, and chains, between her own bedroom and any intruder of human build. To reach her, even in her drawing-room, was like going, as a flag of truce, into a beleaguered fortress; at every sixth step one was stopped by a sort of portcullis. The panic was not confined to the rich; women in the humblest ranks more than once died

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

upon the spot, from the shock attending some suspicious attempts at intrusion upon the part of vagrants, meditating probably nothing worse than a robbery, but whom the poor women, misled by the London newspapers, had fancied to be the dreadful London murderer. Meantime, this solitary artist, that rested in the centre of London, self-supported by his own conscious grandeur, as a domestic Attila, or "scourge of God"; this man, that walked in darkness, and relied upon murder (as afterwards transpired) for bread, for clothes, for promotion in life, was silently preparing an effectual answer to the public journals; and on the twelfth day after his inaugural murder, he advertised his presence in London, and published to all men the absurdity of ascribing to *him* any ruralising propensities, by striking a second blow, and accomplishing a second family extermination. Somewhat lightened was the *provincial* panic by this proof that the murderer had not condescended to sneak into the country, or to abandon for a moment, under any motive of caution or fear, the great metropolitan *castra statua* of gigantic crime, seated for ever on the Thames. In fact, the great artist disdained a provincial reputation; and he must have felt, as a case of ludicrous disproportion, the contrast between a country town or village, on the one hand, and, on the other, a work more lasting than brass—a *κτῆμα ἐς αἰῶνα*—a murder such in quality as any murder that *he* would condescend to own for a work turned out from his own *studio*.

Coleridge, whom I saw some months after these terrific murders, told me, that, for *his* part, though at the time resident in London, he had not shared in the prevailing panic; *him* they affected only as a philosopher, and threw him into a profound reverie upon the tremendous power which is laid open in a moment to any man who can reconcile

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

himself to the abjuration of all conscientious restraints, if, at the same time, thoroughly without fear. Not sharing in the public panic, however, Coleridge did not consider that panic at all unreasonable; for, as he said most truly, in that vast metropolis there are many thousands of households, composed exclusively of women and children; many other thousands there are who necessarily confide their safety, in the long evenings, to the discretion of a young servant girl; and if she suffers herself to be beguiled by the pretence of a message from her mother, sister, or sweetheart, into opening the door, there, in one second of time, goes to wreck the security of the house. However, at that time, and for many months afterwards, the practice of steadily putting the chain upon the door before it was opened prevailed generally, and for a long time served as a record of that deep impression left upon London by Mr Williams. Southey, I may add, entered deeply into the public feeling on this occasion, and said to me, within a week or two of the first murder, that it was a private event of that order which rose to the dignity of a national event. But now, having prepared the reader to appreciate on its true scale this dreadful tissue of murder (which, as a record belonging to an era that is now left forty-two years behind us, not one person in four of this generation can be expected to know correctly), let me pass to the circumstantial details of the affair.

Yet, first of all, one word as to the local scene of the murders. Ratcliffe Highway is a public thoroughfare in a most chaotic quarter of eastern or nautical London; and at this time (*viz.*, in 1812), when no adequate police existed except the *detective* police of Bow Street, admirable for its own peculiar purposes, but utterly incommensurate to the general service of the capital, it was a most

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

dangerous quarter. Every third man at the least might be set down as a foreigner. Lascars, Chinese, Moors, Negroes, were met at every step. And apart from the manifold ruffianism, shrouded impenetrably under the mixed hats and turbans of men whose past was untraceable to any European eye, it is well known that the navy (especially, in time of war, the commercial navy) of Christendom is the sure receptacle of all the murderers and ruffians whose crimes have given them a motive for withdrawing themselves for a season from the public eye. It is true, that few of this class are qualified to act as "able" seamen: but at all times, and especially during war, only a small proportion (or *nucleus*) of each ship's company consists of such men: the large majority being mere untutored landmen. John Williams, however, who had been occasionally rated as a seaman on board of various Indiamen, etc., was probably a very accomplished seaman. Pretty generally, in fact, he was a ready and adroit man, fertile in resources under all sudden difficulties, and most flexibly adapting himself to all varieties of social life. Williams was a man of middle stature (five feet seven and a half, to five feet eight inches high), slenderly built, rather thin, but wiry, tolerably muscular, and clear of all superfluous flesh. A lady, who saw him under examination (I think at the Thames Police Office), assured me that his hair was of the most extraordinary and vivid colour, viz., bright yellow, something between an orange and a lemon colour. Williams had been in India; chiefly in Bengal and Madras; but he had also been upon the Indus. Now, it is notorious that, in the Punjab, horses of a high caste are often painted—crimson, blue, green, purple; and it struck me that Williams might, for some casual purpose of disguise, have taken a hint from this practice of Scinde and Lahore, so that the colour

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

might not have been natural. In other respects, his appearance was natural enough; and, judging by a plaster cast of him, which I purchased in London, I should say mean, as regarded his facial structure. One fact, however, was striking, and fell in with the impression of his natural tiger character, that his face wore at all times a bloodless ghastly pallor. "You might imagine," said my informant, "that in his veins circulated not red life-blood, such as could kindle into the blush of shame, of wrath, of pity—but a green sap that welled from no human heart." His eyes seemed frozen and glazed, as if their light were all converged upon some victim lurking in the far background. So far his appearance might have repelled; but, on the other hand, the concurrent testimony of many witnesses, and also the silent testimony of facts, showed that the oiliness and snaky insinuation of his demeanour counteracted the repulsiveness of his ghastly face, and amongst inexperienced young women won for him a very favourable reception. In particular, one gentle-mannered girl, whom Williams had undoubtedly designed to murder, gave in evidence—that once, when sitting alone with her, he had said, "Now, Miss R., supposing that I should appear about midnight at your bedside, armed with a carving knife, what would you say?" To which the confiding girl had replied, "Oh, Mr Williams, if it was anybody else, I should be frightened. But, as soon as I heard *your* voice, I should be tranquil." Poor girl; had this outline sketch of Mr Williams been filled in and realised, she would have seen something in the corpse-like face, and heard something in the sinister voice, that would have unsettled her tranquillity for ever. But nothing short of such dreadful experiences could avail to unmask Mr John Williams.

Into this perilous region it was that, on a Saturday

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

night in December, Mr Williams, whom we must suppose to have long since made his *coup d'essai*, forced his way through the crowded streets, bound on business. To say was to do. And this night he had said to himself secretly, that he would execute a design which he had already sketched, and which, when finished, was destined on the following day to strike consternation into "all that mighty heart" of London, from centre to circumference. It was afterwards remembered that he had quitted his lodgings on this dark errand about eleven o'clock P.M.; not that he meant to begin so soon: but he needed to reconnoitre. He carried his tools closely buttoned up under his loose roomy coat. It was in harmony with the general subtlety of his character, and his polished hatred of brutality, that by universal agreement his manners were distinguished for exquisite suavity: the tiger's heart was masked by the most insinuating and snaky refinement. All his acquaintances afterwards described his dissimulation as so ready and so perfect, that if, in making his way through the streets, always so crowded on a Saturday night in neighbourhoods so poor, he had accidentally jostled any person, he would (as they were all satisfied) have stopped to offer the most gentlemanly apologies: with his devilish heart brooding over the most hellish of purposes, he would yet have paused to express a benign hope that the huge mallet, buttoned up under his elegant surtout, with a view to the little business that awaited him about ninety minutes further on, had not inflicted any pain on the stranger with whom he had come into collision. Titian, I believe, but certainly Rubens, and perhaps Vandyke, made it a rule never to practise his art but in full dress—point ruffles, bag wig, and diamond-hilted sword: and Mr Williams, there is reason to believe, when he went out for a grand

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

compound massacre (in another sense, one might have applied to it the Oxford phrase of *going out as Grand Compounder*), always assumed black silk stockings and pumps; nor would he on any account have degraded his position as an artist by wearing a morning gown. In his second great performance, it was particularly noticed and recorded by the one sole trembling man, who under killing agonies of fear was compelled (as the reader will find) from a secret stand to become the solitary spectator of his atrocities, that Mr Williams wore a long blue frock, of the very finest cloth, and richly lined with silk. Amongst the anecdotes which circulated about him, it was also said at the time, that Mr Williams employed the first of dentists, and also the first of chiropodists. On no account would he patronise any second-rate skill. And beyond a doubt, in that perilous little branch of business which was practised by himself, he might be regarded as the most aristocratic and fastidious of artists.

But who meantime was the victim, to whose abode he was hurrying? For surely he never could be so indiscreet as to be sailing about on a roving cruise in search of some chance person to murder? Oh, no: he had suited himself with a victim some time before, viz., an old and very intimate friend. For he seems to have laid it down as a maxim—that the best person to murder was a friend; and, in default of a friend, which is an article one cannot always command, an acquaintance: because, in either case, on first approaching his subject, suspicion would be disarmed: whereas a stranger might take alarm, and find in the very countenance of his murderer-elect a warning summons to place himself on guard. However, in the present case, his destined victim was supposed to unite both characters: originally he had

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

been a friend ; but subsequently, on good cause arising, he had become an enemy. Or more probably, as others said, the feelings had long since languished which gave life to either relation of friendship or of enmity. Marr was the name of that unhappy man who (whether in the character of friend or enemy) had been selected for the subject of this present Saturday night's performance. And the story current at that time about the connection between Williams and Marr, having (whether true or not true) never been contradicted upon authority, was, that they sailed in the same Indiaman to Calcutta ; that they had quarrelled when at sea ; but another version of the story said—no : they had quarrelled after returning from sea ; and the subject of their quarrel was Mrs Marr, a very pretty young woman, for whose favour they had been rival candidates, and at one time with most bitter enmity towards each other. Some circumstances give a colour of probability to this story. Otherwise it has sometimes happened, on occasion of a murder not sufficiently accounted for, that, from pure goodness of heart intolerant of a mere sordid motive for a striking murder, some person has forged, and the public has accredited, a story representing the murderer as having moved under some loftier excitement : and in this case the public, too much shocked at the idea of Williams having on the single motive of gain consummated so complex a tragedy, welcomed the tale which represented him as governed by deadly malice, growing out of the more impassioned and noble rivalry for the favour of a woman. The case remains in some degree doubtful ; but, certainly, the probability is, that Mrs Marr had been the true cause, the *causa teterrima*, of the feud between the men. Meantime the minutes are numbered, the sands of the hour-glass are running out, that measure

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

the duration of this feud upon earth. This night it shall cease. To-morrow is the day which in England they call Sunday, which in Scotland they call by the Judaic name of "Sabbath." To both nations, under different names, the day has the same functions ; to both it is a day of rest. For thee also, Marr, it shall be a day of rest, so is it written ; thou, too, young Marr, shalt find rest—thou ; and thy household, and the stranger that is within thy gates. But that rest must be in the world which lies beyond the grave. On this side the grave ye have all slept your final sleep.

The night was one of exceeding darkness ; and in this humble quarter of London, whatever the night happened to be, light or dark, quiet or stormy, all shops were kept open on Saturday nights until twelve o'clock, at the least, and many for half an hour longer. There was no rigorous and pedantic Jewish superstition about the exact limits of Sunday. At the very worst, the Sunday stretched over from one o'clock A.M. of one day, up to eight o'clock A.M. of the next, making a clear circuit of thirty-one hours. This, surely, was long enough. Marr, on this particular Saturday night, would be content if it were even shorter, provided it would come more quickly, for he has been toiling through sixteen hours behind his counter. Marr's position in life was this : he kept a little hosier's shop, and had invested in his stock and the fittings of his shop about £180. Like all men engaged in trade, he suffered some anxieties. He was a new beginner ; but, already, bad debts had alarmed him ; and bills were coming to maturity that were not likely to be met by commensurate sales. Yet, constitutionally, he was a sanguine hopper. At this time he was a stout, fresh-coloured young man of twenty-seven ; in some slight degree uneasy from his commercial prospects ; but still cheerful, and

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

anticipating—(how vainly!)—that for this night, and the next night, at least, he will rest his wearied head and his cares upon the faithful bosom of his sweet lovely young wife. The household of Marr, consisting of five persons, is as follows : First, there is himself, who, if he should happen to be ruined, in a limited commercial sense, has energy enough to jump up again, like a pyramid of fire, and soar high above ruin many times repeated. Yes, poor Marr, so it might be, if thou wert left to thy native energies unmolested ; but even now there stands on the other side of the street one born of hell, who puts his peremptory negative on all these flattering prospects. Second in the list of this household stands his pretty and amiable wife, who is happy after the fashion of youthful wives, for she is only twenty-two, and anxious (if at all) only on account of her darling infant. For, thirdly, there is in a cradle, not quite nine feet below the street, viz., in a warm, cosy kitchen, and rocked at intervals by the young mother, a baby eight months old. Nineteen months have Marr and herself been married ; and this is their first-born child. Grieve not for this child, that it must keep the deep rest of Sunday in some other world ; for wherefore should an orphan, steeped to the lips in poverty, when once bereaved of father and mother, linger upon an alien and a murderous earth ? Fourthly, there is a stoutish boy, an apprentice, say thirteen years old ; a Devonshire boy, with handsome features, such as most Devonshire youths have ; satisfied with his place ; not overworked ; treated kindly, and aware that he was treated kindly, by his master and mistress. Fifthly, and lastly, bringing up the rear of this quiet household, is a servant girl, a grown-up young woman ; and she, being particularly kind-hearted, occupied (as often happens in families of humble pretensions as to rank) a sort of

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

sisterly place in her relation to her mistress. A great democratic change is at this very time (1854), and has been for twenty years, passing over British society. Multitudes of persons are becoming ashamed of saying, "my master," or "my mistress": the term now in the slow process of superseding it is, "my employer." Now, in the United States, such an expression of democratic hauteur, though disagreeable as a needless proclamation of independence which nobody is disputing, leaves, however, no lasting bad effect. For the domestic "helps" are pretty generally in a state of transition so sure and so rapid to the headship of domestic establishments belonging to themselves, that in effect they are but ignoring, for the present moment, a relation which would at any rate dissolve itself in a year or two. But in England, where no such resources exist of everlasting surplus lands, the tendency of the change is painful. It carries with it a sullen and a coarse expression of immunity from a yoke which was in any case a light one, and often a benign one. In some other place, I will illustrate my meaning. Here, apparently, in Mrs Marr's service, the principle concerned illustrated itself practically. Mary, the female servant, felt a sincere and unaffected respect for a mistress whom she saw so steadily occupied with her domestic duties, and who, though so young, and invested with some slight authority, never exerted it capriciously, or even showed it at all conspicuously. According to the testimony of all the neighbours, she treated her mistress with a shade of unobtrusive respect on the one hand, and yet was eager to relieve her, whenever that was possible, from the weight of her maternal duties, with the cheerful voluntary service of a sister.

To this young woman it was, that, suddenly, within three or four minutes of midnight, Marr

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

called aloud from the head of the stairs—directing her to go out and purchase some oysters for the family supper. Upon what slender accidents hang oftentimes solemn life-long results ! Marr occupied in the concerns of his shop, Mrs Marr occupied with some little ailment and restlessness of her baby, had both forgotten the affair of supper ; the time was now narrowing every moment, as regarded any variety of choice ; and oysters were perhaps ordered as the likeliest article to be had at all, after twelve o'clock should have struck. And yet, upon this trivial circumstance depended Mary's life. Had she been sent abroad for supper at the ordinary time of ten or eleven o'clock, it is almost certain that she, the solitary member of the household who escaped from the exterminating tragedy, would *not* have escaped ; too surely she would have shared the general fate. It had now become necessary to be quick. Hastily, therefore, receiving money from Marr, with a basket in her hand, but unbonneted, Mary tripped out of the shop. It became afterwards, on recollection, a heart-chilling remembrance to herself—that, precisely as she emerged from the shop-door, she noticed on the opposite side of the street, by the light of the lamps, a man's figure ; stationary at the instant, but in the next instant slowly moving. This was Williams ; as a little incident, either just before or just after (at present it is impossible to say which), sufficiently proved. Now, when one considers the inevitable hurry and trepidation of Mary under the circumstances stated, time barely sufficing for any chance of executing her errand, it becomes evident that she must have connected some deep feeling of mysterious uneasiness with the movements of this unknown man ; else, assuredly, she would not have found her attention disposable for such a case. Thus far, she herself threw some little light upon

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

what it might be that, semi-consciously, was then passing through her mind; she said that, notwithstanding the darkness, which would not permit her to trace the man's features, or to ascertain the exact direction of his eyes, it yet struck her, that from his carriage when in motion, and from the apparent inclination of his person, he must be looking at No. 29. The little incident which I have alluded to as confirming Mary's belief was, that, at some period not very far from midnight, the watchman had specially noticed this stranger; he had observed him continually peeping into the window of Marr's shop; and had thought this act, connected with the man's appearance, so suspicious, that he stepped into Marr's shop, and communicated what he had seen. This fact he afterwards stated before the magistrates; and he added, that subsequently, viz., a few minutes after twelve (eight or ten minutes, probably, after the departure of Mary), he (the watchman), when re-entering upon his ordinary half-hourly beat, was requested by Marr to assist him in closing the shutters. Here they had a final communication with each other; and the watchman mentioned to Marr that the mysterious stranger had now apparently taken himself off; for that he had not been visible since the first communication made to Marr by the watchman. There is little doubt that Williams had observed the watchman's visit to Marr, and had thus had his attention seasonably drawn to the indiscretion of his own demeanour; so that the warning, given unavailingly to Marr, had been turned to account by Williams. There can be still less doubt, that the bloodhound had commenced his work within one minute of the watchman's assisting Marr to put up his shutters. And on the following consideration: that which prevented Williams from commencing even earlier, was the exposure of the

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

shop's whole interior to the gaze of street passengers. It was indispensable that the shutters should be accurately closed before Williams could safely get to work. But, as soon as ever this preliminary precaution had been completed, once having secured that concealment from the public eye, it then became of still greater importance not to lose a moment by delay, than previously it had been not to hazard anything by precipitance. For all depended upon going in before Marr should have locked the door. On any other mode of effecting an entrance (as, for instance, by waiting for the return of Mary, and making his entrance simultaneously with her), it will be seen that Williams must have forfeited that particular advantage which mute facts, when read into their true construction, will soon show the reader that he must have employed. Williams waited, of necessity, for the sound of the watchman's retreating steps ; waited, perhaps, for thirty seconds ; but when that danger was past, the next danger was, lest Marr should lock the door ; one turn of the key, and the murderer would have been locked out. In, therefore, he bolted, and by a dexterous movement of his left hand, no doubt turned the key, without letting Marr perceive this fatal stratagem. It is really wonderful and most interesting to pursue the successive steps of this monster, and to notice the absolute certainty with which the silent hieroglyphics of the case betray to us the whole process and movements of the bloody drama, not less surely and fully than if we had been ourselves hidden in Marr's shop, or had looked down from the heavens of mercy upon this hell-kite, that knew not what mercy meant. That he had concealed from Marr his trick, secret and rapid, upon the lock, is evident ; because else, Marr would instantly have taken the alarm, especially after what the watchman had communicated. But

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

it will soon be seen that Marr had *not* been alarmed, In reality, towards the full success of Williams, it was important, in the last degree, to intercept and forestall any yell or shout of agony from Marr. Such an outcry, and in a situation so slenderly fenced off from the street, viz., by walls the very thinnest, makes itself heard outside pretty nearly as well as if it were uttered in the street. Such an outcry it was indispensable to stifle. It *was* stifled ; and the reader will soon understand *how*. Meantime, at this point, let us leave the murderer alone with his victims. For fifty minutes let him work his pleasure. The front-door, as we know, is now fastened against all help. Help there is none. Let us, therefore, in vision, attach ourselves to Mary ; and, when all is over, let us come back with *her*, again raise the curtain, and read the dreadful record of all that has passed in her absence.

The poor girl, uneasy in her mind to an extent that she could but half understand, roamed up and down in search of an oyster shop ; and finding none that was still open, within any circuit that her ordinary experience had made her acquainted with, she fancied it best to try the chances of some remoter district. Lights she saw gleaming or twinkling at a distance, that still tempted her onwards ; and thus, amongst unknown streets poorly lighted, and on a night of peculiar darkness, and in a region of London where ferocious tumults were continually turning her out of what seemed to be the direct course, naturally she got bewildered. The purpose with which she started had by this time become hopeless. Nothing remained for her now but to retrace her steps. But this was difficult ; for she was afraid to ask directions from chance passengers, whose appearance the darkness prevented her from reconnoitring. At length by his lantern she recognised a watchman ; through him she was guided

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

into the right road; and in ten minutes more, she found herself back at the door of No. 29, in Ratcliffe Highway. But by this time she felt satisfied that she must have been absent for fifty or sixty minutes; indeed, she had heard, at a distance, the cry of *past one o'clock*, which, commencing a few seconds after one, lasted intermittingly for ten or thirteen minutes.

In the tumult of agonising thoughts that very soon surprised her, naturally it became hard for her to recall distinctly the whole succession of doubts, and jealousies, and shadowy misgivings that soon opened upon her. But, so far as could be collected, she had not in the first moment of reaching home noticed anything decisively alarming. In very many cities bells are the main instruments for communicating between the street and the interior of houses: but in London knockers prevail. At Marr's there was both a knocker and a bell. Mary rang, and at the same time very gently knocked. She had no fear of disturbing her master or mistress; *them* she made sure of finding still up. Her anxiety was for the baby, who being disturbed might again rob her mistress of a night's rest. And she well knew that, with three people all anxiously awaiting her return, and by this time, perhaps, seriously uneasy at her delay, the least audible whisper from herself would in a moment bring one of them to the door. Yet how is this? To her astonishment, but with the astonishment came creeping over her an icy horror, no stir nor murmur was heard ascending from the kitchen. At this moment came back upon her, with shuddering anguish, the indistinct image of the stranger in the loose dark coat, whom she had seen stealing along under the shadowy lamp-light, and too certainly watching her master's motions: keenly she now reproached herself that, under whatever stress of hurry, she

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

had not acquainted Mr Marr with the suspicious appearances. Poor girl! she did not then know that, if this communication could have availed to put Marr upon his guard, it had reached him from another quarter; so that her own omission, which had in reality arisen under her hurry to execute her master's commission, could not be charged with any bad consequences. But all such reflections this way or that were swallowed up at this point in overmastering panic. That her double summons *could* have been unnoticed—this solitary fact in one moment made a revelation of horror. One person might have fallen asleep, but two—but three—*that* was a mere impossibility. And even supposing all three together with the baby locked in sleep, still how unaccountable was this utter—utter silence! Most naturally at this moment something like hysterical horror overshadowed the poor girl, and now at last she rang the bell with the violence that belongs to sickening terror. This done, she paused: self-command enough she still retained, though fast and fast it was slipping away from her, to bethink herself—that, if any overwhelming accident *had* compelled both Marr and his apprentice-boy to leave the house in order to summon surgical aid from opposite quarters—a thing barely supposable—still, even in that case Mrs Marr and her infant would be left; and some murmuring reply, under any extremity, would be elicited from the poor mother. To pause, therefore, to impose stern silence upon herself, so as to leave room for the possible answer to this final appeal, became a duty of spasmodic effort. Listen, therefore, poor trembling heart; listen, and for twenty seconds be still as death. Still as death she was; and during that dreadful stillness, when she hushed her breath that she might listen, occurred an incident of killing fear, that to her dying day would never

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

cease to renew its echoes in her ear. She, Mary, the poor trembling girl, checking and overruling herself by a final effort, that she might leave full opening for her dear young mistress's answer to her own last frantic appeal, heard at last and most distinctly a sound within the house. Yes, now beyond a doubt there is coming an answer to her summons. What was it? On the stairs, not the stairs that led downwards to the kitchen, but the stairs that led upwards to the single storey of bed-chambers above, was heard a creaking sound. Next was heard most distinctly a footfall: one, two, three, four, five stairs were slowly and distinctly descended. Then the dreadful footsteps were heard advancing along the little narrow passage to the door. The steps—oh heavens! *whose* steps?—have paused at the door. The very breathing can be heard of that dreadful being, who has silenced all breathing except his own in the house. There is but a door between him and Mary. What is he doing on the other side of the door? A cautious step, a stealthy step it was that came down the stairs, then paced along the little narrow passage—narrow as a coffin—till at last the step pauses at the door. How hard the fellow breathes! He, the solitary murderer, is on one side the door; Mary is on the other side. Now, suppose that he should suddenly open the door, and that incautiously in the dark Mary should rush in, and find herself in the arms of the murderer. Thus far the case is a possible one—that to a certainty, had this little trick been tried immediately upon Mary's return, it would have succeeded; had the door been opened suddenly upon her first tingle-tingle, head-long she would have tumbled in, and perished. But now Mary is upon her guard. The unknown murderer and she have both their lips upon the door, listening, breathing hard; but luckily they are

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

on different sides of the door ; and upon the least indication of unlocking or unlatching, she would have recoiled into the asylum of general darkness.

What was the murderer's meaning in coming along the passage to the front door ? The meaning was this : separately, as an individual, Mary was worth nothing at all to him. But, considered as a member of a household, she had this value, viz., that she, if caught and murdered, perfected and rounded the desolation of the house. The case being reported, as reported it would be all over Christendom, led the imagination captive. The whole covey of victims was thus netted ; the household ruin was thus full and orbicular ; and in that proportion the tendency of men and women, flutter as they might, would be helplessly and hopelessly to sink into the all-conquering hands of the mighty murderer. He had but to say—my testimonials are dated from No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway, and the poor vanquished imagination sank powerless before the fascinating rattlesnake eye of the murderer. There is not a doubt that the motive of the murderer for standing on the inner side of Marr's front door, whilst Mary stood on the outside, was—a hope that, if he quietly opened the door, whisperingly counterfeiting Marr's voice, and saying, What made you stay so long ? possibly she might have been inveigled. He was wrong ; the time was past for that ; Mary was now maniacally awake ; she began now to ring the bell and to ply the knocker with unintermitting violence. And the natural consequence was, that the next door neighbour, who had recently gone to bed and instantly fallen asleep, was roused ; and by the incessant violence of the ringing and the knocking, which now obeyed a delirious and uncontrollable impulse in Mary, he became sensible that some very dreadful event must be at the root of so clamorous an uproar. To rise,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

to throw up the sash, to demand angrily the cause of this unseasonable tumult, was the work of a moment. The poor girl remained sufficiently mistress of herself rapidly to explain the circumstance of her own absence for an hour; her belief that Mr and Mrs Marr's family had all been murdered in the interval; and that at this very moment the murderer was in the house.

The person to whom she addressed this statement was a pawnbroker; and a thoroughly brave man he must have been; for it was a perilous undertaking, merely as a trial of physical strength, singly to face a mysterious assassin, who had apparently signalled his prowess by a triumph so comprehensive. But, again, for the imagination it required an effort of self-conquest to rush headlong into the presence of one invested with a cloud of mystery, whose nation, age, motives, were all alike unknown. Rarely on any field of battle has a soldier been called upon to face so complex a danger. For if the entire family of his neighbour Marr had been exterminated, were this indeed true, such a scale of bloodshed would seem to argue that there must have been two persons as the perpetrators; or if one singly had accomplished such a ruin, in that case how colossal must have been his audacity! probably, also, his skill and animal power! Moreover, the unknown enemy (whether single or double) would, doubtless, be elaborately armed. Yet, under all these disadvantages, did this fearless man rush at once to the field of butchery in his neighbour's house. Waiting only to draw on his trousers, and to arm himself with the kitchen poker, he went down into his own little back-yard. On this mode of approach, he would have a chance of intercepting the murderer; whereas from the front there would be no such chance; and there would also be considerable delay in the process of breaking open the door. A brick

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

wall, 9 or 10 feet high, divided his own back premises from those of Marr. Over this he vaulted and at the moment when he was recalling himself to the necessity of going back for a candle, he suddenly perceived a feeble ray of light already glimmering on some part of Marr's premises. Marr's back door stood wide open. Probably the murderer had passed through it one half minute before. Rapidly the brave man passed onwards to the shop, and there beheld the carnage of the night stretched out on the floor, and the narrow premises so floated with gore, that it was hardly possible to escape the pollution of blood in picking out a path to the front door. In the lock of the door still remained the key which had given to the unknown murderer so fatal an advantage over his victims. By this time, the heart-shaking news involved in the outcries of Mary (to whom it occurred that by possibility some one out of so many victims might still be within the reach of medical aid, but that all would depend upon speed) had availed, even at that late hour, to gather a small mob about the house. The pawnbroker threw open the door. One or two watchmen headed the crowd; but the soul-harrowing spectacle checked them, and impressed sudden silence upon their voices, previously so loud. The tragic drama read aloud its own history, and the succession of its several steps—few and summary. The murderer was as yet altogether unknown; not even suspected. But there were reasons for thinking that he must have been a person familiarly known to Marr. He had entered the shop by opening the door after it had been closed by Marr. But it was justly argued—that, after the caution conveyed to Marr by the watchman, the appearance of any stranger in the shop at that hour, and in so dangerous a neighbourhood, and entering by so irregular and suspicious a course (*i.e.*, walking

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

in after the door had been closed, and after the closing of the shutters had cut off all open communication with the street), would naturally have roused Marr to an attitude of vigilance and self defence. Any indication, therefore, that Marr had *not* been so roused, would argue to a certainty that *something* had occurred to neutralise this alarm, and fatally to disarm the prudent jealousies of Marr. But this "something" could only have lain in one simple fact, viz., that the person of the murderer was familiarly known to Marr as that of an ordinary and unsuspected acquaintance. This being presupposed as the key to all the rest, the whole course and evolution of the subsequent drama becomes clear as daylight. The murderer, it is evident, had opened gently, and again closed behind him with equal gentleness, the street door. He had then advanced to the little counter, all the while exchanging the ordinary salutation of an old acquaintance with the unsuspecting Marr. Having reached the counter, he would then ask Marr for a pair of unbleached cotton socks. In a shop so small as Marr's, there could be no great latitude of choice for disposing of the different commodities. The arrangement of these had no doubt become familiar to the murderer; and he had already ascertained that, in order to reach down the particular parcel wanted at present, Marr would find it requisite to face round to the rear, and, at the same moment, to raise his eyes and his hands to a level eighteen inches above his own head. This movement placed him in the most disadvantageous possible position with regard to the murderer, who now, at the instant when Marr's hands and eyes were embarrassed, and the back of his head fully exposed, suddenly from below his large surtout, had unslung a heavy ship-carpenter's mallet, and, with one solitary blow, had so thoroughly stunned his victim, as to leave

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

him incapable of resistance. The whole position of Marr told its own tale. He had collapsed naturally behind the counter, with his hands so occupied as to confirm the whole outline of the affair as I have here suggested it. Probable enough it is that the very first blow, the first indication of treachery that reached Marr, would also be the last blow as regarded the abolition of consciousness. The murderer's plan and *rationale* of murder started systematically from this infliction of apoplexy, or at least of a stunning sufficient to insure a long loss of consciousness. This opening step placed the murderer at his ease. But still, as returning sense might constantly have led to the fullest exposures, it was his settled practice, by way of consummation, to cut the throat. To one invariable type all the murders on this occasion conformed: the skull was first shattered; this step secured the murderer from instant retaliation; and, then, by way of locking up all into eternal silence, uniformly the throat was cut. The rest of the circumstances, as self-revealed, were these. The fall of Marr might, probably enough, cause a dull confused sound of a scuffle, and the more so, as it could not now be confounded with any street uproar—the shop-door being shut. It is more probable, however, that the signal for the alarm passing down to the kitchen, would arise when the murderer proceeded to cut Marr's throat. The very confined situation behind the counter would render it impossible, under the critical hurry of the case, to expose the throat broadly; the horrid scene would proceed by partial and interrupted cuts; deep groans would arise; and then would come the rush up-stairs. Against this, as the only dangerous stage in the transaction, the murderer would have specially prepared. Mrs Marr and the apprentice-boy, both young and active, would make, of course, for the street-door; had

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Mary been at home, and three persons at once had combined to distract the purposes of the murderer, it is barely possible that one of them would have succeeded in reaching the street. But the dreadful swing of the heavy mallet intercepted both the boy and his mistress before they could reach the door. Each of them lay stretched out on the centre of the shop floor ; and the very moment that this disabling was accomplished, the accursed hound was down upon their throats with his razor. The fact is, that, in the mere blindness of pity for poor Marr, on hearing his groans, Mrs Marr had lost sight of her obvious policy ; she and the boy ought to have made for the back door ; the alarm would thus have been given in the open air ; which, of itself, was a great point ; and several means of distracting the murderer's attention offered upon that course, which the extreme limitation of the shop denied to them upon the other.

Vain would be all attempts to convey the horror which thrilled the gathering spectators of this piteous tragedy. It was known to the crowd that one person had, by some accident, escaped the general massacre ; but she was now speechless, and probably delirious ; so that, in compassion for her pitiable situation, one female neighbour had carried her away, and put her to bed. Hence it had happened, for a longer space of time than could else have been possible, that no person present was sufficiently acquainted with the Marrs to be aware of the little infant ; for the bold pawnbroker had gone off to make a communication to the coroner ; and another neighbour, to lodge some evidence which he thought urgent at a neighbouring police-office. Suddenly some person appeared amongst the crowd who was aware that the murdered parents had a young infant ; this would be found either below-stairs, or in one of the bedrooms above.

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

Immediately a stream of people poured down into the kitchen, where at once they saw the cradle—but with the bedclothes in a state of indescribable confusion. On disentangling these, pools of blood became visible; and the next ominous sign was, that the hood of the cradle had been smashed to pieces. It became evident that the wretch had found himself doubly embarrassed—first, by the arched hood, at the head of the cradle, which accordingly he had beat into a ruin with his mallet, and secondly, by the gathering of the blankets and pillows about the baby's head. The free play of his blows had thus been baffled. And he had therefore finished the scene by applying his razor to the throat of the little innocent; after which, with no apparent purpose, as though he had become confused by the spectacle of his own atrocities, he had busied himself in piling the clothes elaborately over the child's corpse. This incident undeniably gave the character of a vindictive proceeding to the whole affair, and so far confirmed the current rumour that the quarrel between Williams and Marr had originated in rivalry. One writer, indeed, alleged that the murderer might have found it necessary for his own safety to extinguish the crying of the child; but it was justly replied, that a child only eight months old could not have cried under any sense of the tragedy proceeding, but simply in its ordinary way for the absence of its mother; and such a cry, even if audible at all out of the house, must have been precisely what the neighbours were hearing constantly, so that it could have drawn no special attention, nor suggested any reasonable alarm to the murderer. No one incident, indeed, throughout the whole tissue of atrocities, so much envenomed the popular fury against the unknown ruffian, as this useless butchery of the infant.

Naturally, on the Sunday morning that dawned

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

four or five hours later, the case was too full of horror not to diffuse itself in all directions ; but I have no reason to think that it crept into any one of the numerous Sunday papers. In the regular course, any ordinary occurrence, not occurring, or not transpiring until 15 minutes after 1 A.M. on a Sunday morning, would first reach the public ear through the Monday editions of the Sunday papers, and the regular morning papers of the Monday. But, if such were the course pursued on this occasion, never can there have been a more signal oversight. For it is certain, that to have met the public demand for details on the Sunday, which might so easily have been done by cancelling a couple of dull columns, and substituting a circumstantial narrative, for which the pawnbroker and the watchman could have furnished the materials, would have made a small fortune. By proper handbills dispersed through all quarters of the infinite metropolis, 250,000 extra copies might have been sold, that is, by any journal that should have collected *exclusive* materials, meeting the public excitements, everywhere stirred to the centre by flying rumours, and everywhere burning for ampler information. On the Sunday se'ennight (Sunday the *octave* from the event), took place the funeral of the Marrs ; in the first coffin was placed Marr ; in the second Mrs Marr, and the baby in her arms ; in the third the apprentice-boy. They were buried side by side ; and 30,000 labouring people followed the funeral procession, with horror and grief written in their countenances.

As yet no whisper was afloat that indicated, even conjecturally, the hideous author of these runs—this patron of gravediggers. Had^d as much been known on this Sunday of the funeral concerning that person as became known universally six days later, the people would have gone right from the

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

churchyard to the murderer's lodgings, and (brooking no delay) would have torn him limb from limb. As yet, however, in mere default of any object on whom reasonable suspicion could settle, the public wrath was compelled to suspend itself. Else, far indeed from showing any tendency to subside, the public emotion strengthened every day conspicuously, as the reverberation of the shock began to travel back from the provinces to the capital. On every great road in the kingdom continual arrests were made of vagrants and "trampers," who could give no satisfactory account of themselves, or whose appearance in any respect answered to the imperfect description of Williams furnished by the watchman.

With this mighty tide of pity and indignation pointing backwards to the dreadful past, there mingled also in the thoughts of reflecting persons an under-current of fearful expectation for the immediate future. "The earthquake," to quote a fragment from a striking passage in Wordsworth—

The earthquake is not satisfied at once.

All perils, specially malignant, are recurrent. A murderer, who is such by passion and by a wolfish craving for bloodshed as a mode of unnatural luxury, cannot relapse into *inertia*. Such a man, even more than the Alpine chamois hunter, comes to crave the dangers and the hairbreadth escapes of his trade, as a condiment for seasoning the insipid monotones of daily life. But, apart from the hellish instincts that might too surely be relied on for renewed atrocities, it was clear that the murderer of the Marrs, wheresoever lurking, must be a needy man; and a needy man of that class least likely to seek or to find resources in honourable modes of industry; for which, equally by haughty disgust and

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

by disuse of the appropriate habits, men of violence are specially disqualified. Were it, therefore, merely for a livelihood, the murderer, whom all hearts were yearning to decipher, might be expected to make his resurrection on some stage of horror, after a reasonable interval. Even in the Marr murder, granting that it had been governed chiefly by cruel and vindictive impulses, it was still clear that the desire of booty had co-operated with such feelings. Equally clear it was that this desire must have been disappointed : excepting the trivial sum reserved by Marr for the week's expenditure, the murderer found, doubtless, little or nothing that he could turn to account. Two guineas, perhaps, would be the outside of what he had obtained in the way of booty. A week or so would see the end of that. The conviction, therefore, of all people was, that in a month or two, when the fever of excitement might a little have cooled down, or have been superseded by other topics of fresher interest, so that the newborn vigilance of household life would have had time to relax, some new murder, equally appalling, might be counted upon.

Such was the public expectation. Let the reader then figure to himself the pure frenzy of horror when in this hush of expectation, looking, indeed, and waiting for the unknown arm to strike once more, but not believing that any audacity could be equal to such an attempt as yet, whilst all eyes were watching, suddenly, on the twelfth night from the Marr murder, a second case of the same mysterious nature, a murder on the same exterminating plan, was perpetrated in the very same neighbourhood. It was on the Thursday next but one succeeding to the Marr murder that this second atrocity took place ; and many people thought at the time, that in its dramatic features of thrilling interest this second case even went beyond the first. The family

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

which suffered in this instance was that of a Mr Williamson; and the house was situated, if not absolutely *in* Ratcliffe Highway, at any rate immediately round the corner of some secondary street, running at right angles to this public thoroughfare. Mr Williamson was a well-known and respectable man, long settled in that district; he was supposed to be rich; and more with a view to the employment furnished by such a calling, than with much anxiety for further accumulations, he kept a sort of tavern; which, in this respect, might be considered on an old patriarchal footing—that, although people of considerable property resorted to the house in the evenings, no kind of anxious separation was maintained between them and the other visitors from the class of artisans or common labourers. Anybody who conducted himself with propriety was free to take a seat, and call for any liquor that he might prefer. And thus the society was pretty miscellaneous; in part stationary, but in some proportion fluctuating. The household consisted of the following five persons:—1, Mr Williamson, its head, who was an old man above seventy, and was well fitted for his situation, being civil, and not at all morose, but, at the same time, firm in maintaining order; 2, Mrs Williamson, his wife, about ten years younger than himself; 3, a little granddaughter, about nine years old; 4, a housemaid, who was nearly forty years old; 5, a young journeyman, aged about twenty-six, belonging to some manufacturing establishment (of what class I have forgotten); neither do I remember of what nation he was. It was the established rule at Mr Williamson's, that, exactly as the clock struck eleven, all the company, without favour or exception, moved off. That was one of the customs by which, in so stormy a district, Mr Williamson had found it possible to keep his house free from brawls. On

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the present Thursday night everything had gone on as usual, except for one slight shadow of suspicion, which had caught the attention of more persons than one. Perhaps at a less agitating time it would hardly have been noticed ; but now, when the first question and the last in all social meetings turned upon the Marrs, and their unknown murderer, it was a circumstance naturally fitted to cause some uneasiness, that a stranger, of sinister appearance, in a wide surtout, had flitted in and out of the room at intervals during the evening ; had sometimes retired from the light into obscure corners ; and, by more than one person, had been observed stealing into the private passages of the house. It was presumed in general that the man must be known to Williamson. And, in some slight degree, as an occasional customer of the house, it is not impossible that he *was*. But afterwards, this repulsive stranger, with his cadaverous ghastliness, extraordinary hair, and glazed eyes, showing himself intermittingly through the hours from 8 to 11 P.M., revolved upon the memory of all who had steadily observed him with something of the same freezing effect as belongs to the two assassins in *Macbeth*, who present themselves reeking from the murder of Banquo, and gleaming dimly, with dreadful faces, from the misty background, athwart the pomps of the regal banquet.

Meantime the clock struck eleven ; the company broke up ; the door of entrance was nearly closed ; and at this moment of general dispersion the situation of the five inmates left upon the premises was precisely this : the three elders, viz., Williamson, his wife, and his female servant, were all occupied on the ground-floor—Williamson, himself was drawing ale, porter, etc., for those neighbours in whose favour the house door had been left ajar, until the hour of twelve should strike ; Mrs

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

Williamson and her servant were moving to and fro between the back kitchen and a little parlour; the little granddaughter, whose sleeping room was on the *first* floor (which term in London means always the floor raised by one flight of stairs above the level of the street), had been fast asleep since nine o'clock; lastly, the journeyman artisan had retired to rest for some time. He was a regular lodger in the house; and his bedroom was on the second floor. For some time he had been undressed, and had lain down in bed. Being, as a working man, bound to habits of early rising, he was naturally anxious to fall asleep as soon as possible. But, on this particular night, his uneasiness, arising from the recent murders at No. 29, rose to a paroxysm of nervous excitement which kept him awake. It is possible, that from somebody he had heard of the suspicious-looking stranger, or might even personally have observed him slinking about. But, were it otherwise, he was aware of several circumstances dangerously affecting this house; for instance, the ruffianism of this whole neighbourhood, and the disagreeable fact that the Marrs had lived within a few doors of this very house, which again argued that the murderer also lived at no great distance. These were matters of *general* alarm. But there were others peculiar to this house; in particular, the notoriety of Williamson's opulence; the belief, whether well or ill founded, that he accumulated, in desks and drawers, the money continually flowing into his hands; and lastly, the danger so ostentatiously courted by that habit of leaving the house door ajar through one entire hour—and that hour loaded with extra danger, by the well-advertised assurance that no collision need be feared with chance convivial visitors, since all such people were banished at eleven. A regulation, which had

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

hitherto operated beneficially for the character and comfort of the house, now, on the contrary, under altered circumstances, became a positive proclamation of exposure and defencelessness, through one entire period of an hour. Williamson himself, it was said generally, being a large unwieldy man, past seventy, and signally inactive, ought, in prudence, to make the locking of his door coincident with the dismissal of his evening party.

Upon these and other grounds of alarm (particularly this, that Mrs Williamson was reported to possess a considerable quantity of plate), the journeyman was musing painfully, and the time might be within twenty-eight or twenty-five minutes of twelve, when all at once, with a crash, proclaiming some hand of hideous violence, the house door was suddenly shut and locked. Here, then, beyond all doubt, was the diabolic man, clothed in mystery, from No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway. Yes, that dreadful being, who for twelve days had employed all thoughts and all tongues, was now, too certainly, in this defenceless house, and would, in a few minutes, be face to face with every one of its inmates. A question still lingered in the public mind—whether at Marr's there might not have been *two* men at work. If so, there would be two at present; and one of the two would be immediately disposable for the up-stairs work; since no danger could obviously be more immediately fatal to such an attack than any alarm given from an upper window to the passengers in the street. Through one half-minute the poor panic-stricken man sat up motionless in bed. But then he rose, his first movement being towards the door of his room. Not for any purpose of securing it against intrusion—too well he knew that there was no fastening of any sort—neither lock, nor bolt; nor was there any such movable furniture in the room

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

as might have availed to barricade the door, even if time could be counted on for such an attempt. It was no effect of prudence, merely the fascination of killing fear it was, that drove him to open the door. One step brought him to the head of the stairs; he lowered his head over the balustrade in order to listen; and at that moment ascended, from the little parlour, this agonising cry from the woman-servant, "Lord Jesus Christ! we shall all be murdered!" What a Medusa's head must have lurked in those dreadful bloodless features, and those glazed rigid eyes, that seemed rightfully belonging to a corpse, when one glance at them sufficed to proclaim a death-warrant.

Three separate death-struggles were by this time over; and the poor petrified journeyman, quite unconscious of what he was doing, in blind, passive, self-surrender to panic, absolutely descended both flights of stairs. Infinite terror inspired him with the same impulse as might have been inspired by headlong courage. In his shirt, and upon old decaying stairs, that at times creaked under his feet, he continued to descend, until he had reached the lowest step but four. The situation was tremendous beyond any that is on record. A sneeze, a cough, almost a breathing, and the young man would be a corpse, without a chance or a struggle for his life. The murderer was at that time in the little parlour—the door of which parlour faced you in descending the stairs; and this door stood ajar; indeed, much more considerably open than what is understood by the term "ajar." Of that quadrant, or 90 degrees, which the door would describe in swinging so far open as to stand at right angles to the lobby, or to itself, in a closed position, 55 degrees at the least were exposed. Consequently, two out of three corpses were exposed to the young man's gaze. Where was the third? And

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

the murderer—where was he? As to the murderer, he was walking rapidly backwards and forwards in the parlour, audible but not visible at first, being engaged with something or other in that part of the room which the door still concealed. What the something might be, the sound soon explained; he was applying keys tentatively to a cupboard, a closet, and a scrutoire, in the hidden part of the room. Very soon, however, he came into view; but, fortunately for the young man, at this critical moment, the murderer's purpose too entirely absorbed him to allow of his throwing a glance to the staircase, on which else the white figure of the journeyman, standing in motionless horror, would have been detected in one instant, and seasoned for the grave in the second. As to the third corpse, the missing corpse, viz., Mr Williamson's, *that* is in the cellar; and how its local position can be accounted for, remains as a separate question much discussed at the time, but never satisfactorily cleared up. Meantime, that Williamson was dead, became evident to the young man; since else he would have been heard stirring or groaning. Three friends, therefore, out of four, whom the young man had parted with forty minutes ago, were now extinguished; remained, therefore, 40 per cent. (a large percentage for Williams to leave); remained, in fact, himself and his pretty young friend, the little granddaughter, whose childish innocence was still slumbering without fear for herself, or grief for her aged grandparents. If *they* are gone for ever, happily one friend (for such he will prove himself, indeed, if, from such a danger he can save this child) is pretty near to her. But alas! he is still nearer to a murderer. At this moment he is unnerved for any exertion whatever; he has changed into a pillar of ice; for the objects before him, separated by just thirteen feet, are these:

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

The housemaid had been caught by the murderer on her knees ; she was kneeling before the fire-grate, which she had been polishing with black lead. That part of her task was finished ; and she had passed on to another task, viz., the filling of the grate with wood and coals, not for kindling at this moment, but so as to have it ready for kindling on the next day. The appearances all showed that she must have been engaged in this labour at the very moment when the murderer entered ; and perhaps the succession of the incidents arranged itself as follows : From the awful ejaculation and loud outcry to Christ, as overheard by the journeyman, it was clear that then first she had been alarmed ; yet this was at least one and a half or even two minutes after the door-slamming. Consequently the alarm which had so fearfully and seasonably alarmed the young man, must, in some unaccountable way, have been misinterpreted by the two women. It was said, at the time, that Mrs Williamson laboured under some dullness of hearing ; and it was conjectured that the servant, having her ears filled with the noise of her own scrubbing, and her head half under the grate, might have confounded it with the street noises, or else might have imputed this violent closure to some mischievous boys. But, howsoever explained, the fact was evident, that, until the words of appeal to Christ, the servant had noticed nothing suspicious, nothing which interrupted her labours. If so, it followed that neither had Mrs Williamson noticed anything ; for, in that case, she would have communicated her own alarm to the servant, since both were in the same small room. Apparently the course of things after the murderer had entered the room was this : Mrs Williamson had probably not seen him, from the accident of standing with her back to the door. Her, therefore, before he

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

was himself observed at all, he had stunned and prostrated by a shattering blow on the back of her head ; this blow, inflicted by a crowbar, had smashed in the hinder part of the skull. She fell ; and by the noise of her fall (for all was the work of a moment) had first roused the attention of the servant ; who then uttered the cry which had reached the young man ; but before she could repeat it, the murderer had descended with his uplifted instrument upon *her* head, crushing the skull inwards upon the brain. Both the women were irrecoverably destroyed, so that further outrages were needless ; and, moreover, the murderer was conscious of the imminent danger from delay ; and yet, in spite of his hurry, so fully did he appreciate the fatal consequences to himself, if any of his victims should so far revive into consciousness as to make circumstantial depositions, that, by way of making this impossible, he had proceeded instantly to cut the throat of each. All this tallied with the appearances as now presenting themselves. Mrs Williamson had fallen backwards with her head to the door ; the servant, from her kneeling posture, had been incapable of rising, and had presented her head passively to blows ; after which, the muscreant had but to bend her head backwards so as to expose her throat, and the murder was finished. It is remarkable that the young artisan, paralysed as he had been by fear, and evidently fascinated for a time so as to walk right towards the lion's mouth, yet found himself able to notice everything important. The reader must suppose him at this point watching the murderer whilst hanging over the body of Mrs Williamson, and whilst renewing his search for certain important keys. Doubtless it was an anxious situation for the murderer ; for, unless he speedily found the keys wanted, all this hideous

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

tragedy would end in nothing but a prodigious increase of the public horror, in tenfold precautions therefore, and redoubled obstacles interposed between himself and his future game. Nay, there was even a nearer interest at stake ; his own immediate safety might, by a probable accident, be compromised. Most of those who came to the house for liquor were giddy girls or children, who, on finding this house closed, would go off carelessly to some other ; but, let any thoughtful woman or man come to the door now, a full quarter of an hour before the established time of closing, in that case suspicion would arise too powerful to be checked. There would be a sudden alarm given ; after which, mere luck would decide the event. For it is a remarkable fact, and one that illustrates the singular inconsistency of this villain, who, being often so superfluously subtle, was in other directions so reckless and improvident, that at this very moment, standing amongst corpses that had deluged the little parlour with blood, Williams must have been in considerable doubt whether he had any sure means of egress. There were windows, he knew, to the back ; but upon what ground they opened, he seems to have had no certain information ; and in a neighbourhood so dangerous, the windows of the lower storey would not improbably be nailed down ; those in the upper might be free, but then came the necessity of a leap too formidable. From all this, however, the sole practical inference was to hurry forward with the trial of further keys, and to detect the hidden treasure. This it was, this intense absorption in one overmastering pursuit, that dulled the murderer's perceptions as to all around him ; otherwise, he must have heard the breathing of the young man, which to himself at times became fearfully audible. As the murderer stood once more over the body of Mrs Williamson,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

and searched her pockets more narrowly, he pulled out various clusters of keys, one of which dropping, gave a harsh jingling sound upon the floor. At this time it was that the secret witness, from his secret stand, noticed the fact of Williams's surtout being lined with silk of the finest quality. One other fact he noticed, which eventually became more immediately important than many stronger circumstances of incrimination ; this was, that the shoes of the murderer, apparently new, and bought, probably, with poor Marr's money, creaked as he walked, harshly and frequently. With the new clusters of keys, the murderer walked off to the hidden section of the parlour. And here, at last, was suggested to the journeyman the sudden opening for an escape. Some minutes would be lost to a certainty in trying all these keys ; and subsequently in searching the drawers, supposing that the keys answered—or in violently forcing them, supposing that they did *not*. He might thus count upon a brief interval of leisure, whilst the rattling of the keys might obscure to the murderer the creaking of the stairs under the reascending journeyman. His plan was now formed : on regaining his bedroom, he placed the bed against the door by way of a transient retardation to the enemy, that might give him a short warning, and in the worst extremity, might give him a chance for life by means of a desperate leap. This change made as quietly as was possible, he tore the sheets, pillow-cases, and blankets into broad ribbons ; and after plaiting them into ropes, spliced the different lengths together. But at the very first he descries this ugly addition to his labours. Where shall he look for any staple, hook, bar, or other fixture, from which his rope, when twisted, may safely depend ? Measured from the window-sill—*i.e.*, the lowest part of the window architrave—there

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

count but twenty-two or twenty-three feet to the ground. Of this length ten or twelve feet may be looked upon as cancelled, because to that extent he might drop without danger. So much being deducted, there would remain, say, a dozen feet of rope to prepare. But, unhappily there is no stout iron fixture anywhere about his window. The nearest, indeed the sole fixture of that sort, is not near to the window at all; it is a spike fixed (for no reason at all that is apparent) in the bed-tester; now, the bed being shifted, the spike is shifted; and its distance from the window, having always been four feet, is now seven. Seven entire feet, therefore, must be added to that which would have sufficed if measured from the window. But courage! God, by the proverb of all nations in Christendom, helps those that help themselves. This our young man thankfully acknowledges; he reads already, in the very fact of any spike at all being found where hitherto it has been useless, an earnest of providential aid. Were it only for himself that he worked, he could not feel himself meritoriously employed; but this is not so; in deep sincerity, he is now agitated for the poor child, whom he knows and loves; every minute, he feels, brings ruin nearer to *her*; and, as he passed her door, his first thought had been to take her out of bed in his arms, and to carry her where she might share his chances. But, on consideration, he felt that this sudden awaking of her, and the impossibility of even whispering any explanation, would cause her to cry audibly; and the inevitable indiscretion of one would be fatal to the two. As the Alpine avalanches, when suspended above the traveller's head, oftentimes (we are told) come down through the stirring of the air by a simple whisper, precisely on such a tenure of a whisper was now suspended the murderous malice of the man below.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

No ; there is but one way to save the child ; towards *her* deliverance, the first step is through his own. And he has made an excellent beginning ; for the spike, which too fearfully he had expected to see torn away by any strain upon it from the half-carious wood, stands firmly when tried against the pressure of his own weight. He has rapidly fastened on to it three lengths of his new rope, measuring eleven feet. He plaits it roughly ; so that only three feet have been lost in the inter-twisting ; he has spliced on a second length equal to the first ; so that, already, sixteen feet are ready to throw out of the window ; and thus, let the worst come to the worst, it will not be absolute ruin to swarm down the rope so far as it will reach, and then to drop boldly. All this has been accomplished in about six minutes ; and the hot contest between above and below is still steadily but fervently proceeding. Murderer is working hard in the parlour ; journeyman is working hard in the bedroom. Miscreant is getting on famously downstairs ; one batch of bank-notes he has already bagged ; and is hard upon the scent of a second. He has also sprung a covey of golden coins. Sovereigns as yet were not ; but guineas at this period fetched thirty shillings apiece ; and he has worked his way into a little quarry of these. Murderer is almost joyous ; and if any creature is still living in this house, as shrewdly he suspects, and very soon means to know, with that creature he would be happy, before cutting the creature's throat, to drink a glass of something. Instead of the glass, might he not make a present to the poor creature of its throat ? Oh no ! impossible ! Throats are a sort of thing that he never makes presents of ; business—business must be attended to. Really the two men, considered simply as men of business, are both meritorious. Like chorus

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

and semi-chorus, strophe and anti-strophe, they work each against the other. Pull journeyman, pull murderer! Pull baker, pull devil! As regards the journeyman, he is now safe. To his sixteen feet, of which seven are neutralised by the distance of the bed, he has at last added six feet more, which will be short of reaching the ground by perhaps ten feet—a trifle which man or boy may drop without injury. All is safe, therefore, for him: which is more than one can be sure of for miscreant in the parlour. Miscreant, however, takes it coolly enough: the reason being, that, with all his cleverness, for once in his life miscreant has been over-reached. The reader and I know, but miscreant does not in the least suspect, a little fact of some importance, viz., that just now through a space of full three minutes he has been overlooked and studied by one, who (though reading in a dreadful book, and suffering under mortal panic) took accurate notes of so much as his limited opportunities allowed him to see, and will assuredly report the creaking shoes and the silk-mounted surtout in quarters where such little facts will tell very little to his advantage. But, although it is true that Mr Williams, unaware of the journeyman's having "assisted" at the examination of Mrs Williamson's pockets, could not connect any anxiety with that person's subsequent proceedings, nor specially, therefore, with his having embarked in the rope-weaving line, assuredly he knew of reasons enough for not loitering. And yet he *did* loiter. Reading his acts by the light of such mute traces as he left behind him, the police became aware that latterly he must have loitered. And the reason which governed him is striking; because at once it records—that murder was not pursued by him simply as a means to an end, but also as an end for itself. Mr Williams had now been upon the

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

premises for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes ; and in that space of time he had despatched, in a style satisfactory to himself, a considerable amount of business. He had done, in commercial language, "a good stroke of business." Upon two floors, viz., the cellar-floor and the ground-floor, he has "accounted for" all the population. But there remained at least two floors more ; and it now occurred to Mr Williams that, although the landlord's somewhat chilling manner had shut him out from any familiar knowledge of the household arrangements, too probably on one or other of those floors there must be some throats. As to plunder, he has already bagged the whole. And it was next to impossible that any arrear the most trivial should still remain for a gleaner. But the throats—the throats—there it was that arrears and gleanings might perhaps be counted on. And thus it appeared that, in his wolfish thirst for blood, Mr Williams put to hazard the whole fruits of his night's work, and his life into the bargain. At this moment, if the murderer knew all, could he see the open window above stairs ready for the descent of the journeyman, could he witness the life-and-death rapidity with which that journeyman is working, could he guess at the almighty uproar which within ninety seconds will be maddening the population of this populous district—no picture of a maniac in flight of panic or in pursuit of vengeance would adequately represent the agony of haste with which he would himself be hurrying to the street-door for final evasion. That mode of escape was still free. Even at this moment, there yet remained time sufficient for a successful flight, and, therefore, for the following revolution in the romance of his own abominable life. He had in his pockets above a hundred pounds of booty ; means, therefore, for a full disguise. This very night, if he will shave

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

off his yellow hair, and blacken his eyebrows, buying, when morning light returns, a dark-coloured wig, and clothes such as may co-operate in personating the character of a grave professional man, he may elude all suspicions of impertinent policemen—may sail by any one of a hundred vessels bound for any port along the huge line of sea-board (stretching through 2400 miles) of the American United States; may enjoy fifty years for leisurely repentance; and may even die in the odour of sanctity. On the other hand, if he prefer active life, it is not impossible that, with *his* subtlety, hardihood, and unscrupulousness, in a land where the simple process of naturalisation converts the alien at once into a child of the family, he might rise to the president's chair; might have a statue at his death; and afterwards a life in three volumes quarto, with no hint glancing towards No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway. But all depends on the next ninety seconds. Within that time there is a sharp turn to be taken; there is a wrong turn, and a right turn. Should his better angel guide him to the right one, all may yet go well as regards this world's prosperity. But behold! in two minutes from this point we shall see him take the wrong one: and then Nemesis will be at his heels with ruin perfect and sudden.

Meantime, if the murderer allows himself to loiter, the ropemaker overhead does *not*. Well he knows that the poor child's fate is on the edge of a razor; for all turns upon the alarm being raised before the murderer reaches her bedside. And at this very moment, whilst desperate agitation is nearly paralysing his fingers, he hears the sullen stealthy step of the murderer creeping up through the darkness. It had been the expectation of the journeyman (founded on the clamorous uproar with which the street-door was slammed) that Williams,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

when disposable for his upstairs work, would come racing at a long jubilant gallop, and with a tiger roar; and perhaps, on his natural instincts, he would have done so. But this mode of approach, which was of dreadful effect when applied to a case of surprise, became dangerous in the case of people who might by this time have been placed fully upon their guard. The step which he had heard was on the staircase—but upon which stair? He fancied upon the lowest: and in a movement so slow and cautious, even this might make all the difference; yet might it not have been the tenth, twelfth, or fourteenth stair? Never, perhaps, in this world did any man feel his own responsibility so cruelly loaded and strained, as at this moment did the poor journeyman on behalf of the slumbering child. Lose but two seconds, through awkwardness or through the self-counteractions of panic, and for *her* the total difference arose between life and death. Still there is a hope: and nothing can so frightfully expound the hellish nature of him whose baleful shadow, to speak astrologically, at this moment darkens the house of life, than the simple expression of the ground on which this hope rested. The journeyman felt sure that the murderer would not be satisfied to kill the poor child whilst unconscious. This would be to defeat his whole purpose in murdering *her* at all. To an epicure in murder such as Williams, it would be taking away the very sting of the enjoyment, if the poor child should be suffered to drink off the bitter cup of death without fully apprehending the misery of the situation. But this luckily would, require time: the double confusion of mind, first, from being roused up at so unusual an hour, and, secondly, from the horror of the occasion when explained to *her*, would at first produce fainting, or some mode of insensibility or distraction, such as must occupy a considerable

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

time. The logic of the case, in short, all rested upon the *ultra* fiendishness of Williams. Were he likely to be content with the mere fact of the child's death, apart from the process and leisurely expansion of its mental agony—in that case there would be no hope. But, because our present murderer is fastidiously finical in his exactions—a sort of martinet in the scenical grouping and draping of the circumstances in his murders—therefore it is that hope becomes reasonable, since all such refinements of preparation demand time. Murders of mere necessity Williams was obliged to hurry; but, in a murder of pure voluptuousness, entirely disinterested, where no hostile witness was to be removed, no extra booty to be gained, and no revenge to be gratified, it is clear that to hurry would be altogether to ruin. If this child, therefore, is to be saved, it will be on pure æsthetical considerations.

But all considerations whatever are at this moment suddenly cut short. A second step is heard on the stairs, but still stealthy and cautious; a third—and then the child's doom seems fixed. But just at that moment all is ready. The window is wide open; the rope is swinging free; the journeyman has launched himself; and already he is in the first stage of his descent. Simply by the weight of his person he descended, and by the resistance of his hands he retarded the descent. The danger was, that the rope should run too smoothly through his hands, and that by too rapid an acceleration of pace he should come violently to the ground. Happily he was able to resist the descending impetus: the knots of the splicings furnished a succession of retardations. But the rope proved shorter by four or five feet than he had calculated: ten or eleven feet from the ground he hung suspended in the air; speechless for the present, through long-continued agitation; and not daring to drop boldly

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

on the rough carriage pavement, lest he should fracture his legs. But the night was not dark, as it had been on occasion of the Marr murders. And yet, for purposes of criminal police, it was by accident worse than the darkest night that ever hid a murder or baffled a pursuit. London, from east to west, was covered with a deep pall (rising from the river) of universal fog. Hence it happened, that for twenty or thirty seconds the young man hanging in the air was not observed. His white shirt at length attracted notice. Three or four people ran up, and received him in their arms, all anticipating some dreadful annunciation. To what house did he belong? Even *that* was not instantly apparent; but he pointed with his finger to Williamson's door, and said in a half-choking whisper—"Marr's murderer, now at work!"

All explained itself in a moment: the silent language of the fact made its own eloquent revelation. The mysterious exterminator of No. 29 Ratcliffe Highway had visited another house; and, behold! one man only had escaped through the air, and in his night-dress, to tell the tale. Superstitiously, there was something to check the pursuit of this unintelligible criminal. Morally, and in the interests of vindictive justice, there was everything to rouse, quicken, and sustain it.

Yes, Marr's murderer—the man of mystery—was again at work; at this moment perhaps extinguishing some lamp of life, and not at any remote place, but here—in the very house which the listeners to this dreadful announcement were actually touching. The chaos and blind uproar of the scene which followed, measured by the crowded reports in the journals of many subsequent days, and in one feature of that case, has never to my knowledge had its parallel; or, if a parallel, only in one case—what followed, I mean, on the acquittal

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

of the seven bishops at Westminster in 1688. At present there was more than passionate enthusiasm; The frenzied movement of mixed horror and exultation—the ululation of vengeance which ascended instantaneously from the individual street, and then by a sublime sort of magnetic contagion from all the adjacent streets, can be adequately expressed only by a rapturous passage in Shelley :

The transport of a fierce and monstrous gladness
Spread through the multitudinous streets, fast flying
Upon the wings of fear : From his dull madness
The starveling waked, and died in joy : the dying,
Among the corpses in stark agony lying,
Just heard the happy tidings, and in hope,
Closed their faint eyes : from house to house replying
With loud acclaim the living shook heaven's cope,
And fill'd the startled earth with echoes.

There was something, indeed, half inexplicable in the instantaneous interpretation of the gathering shout according to its true meaning. In fact, the deadly roar of vengeance, and its sublime unity, *could* point in this district only to the one demon whose idea had brooded and tyrannised, for twelve days, over the general heart : every door, every window in the neighbourhood, flew open as if at a word of command ; multitudes, without waiting for the regular means of egress, leaped down at once from the windows on the lower storey ; sick men rose from their beds ; in one instance, as if expressly to verify the image of Shelley (in v. 4, 5, 6, 7), a man whose death had been looked for through some days, and who actually *did* die on the following day, rose, armed himself with a sword, and descended in his shirt into the street. The chance was a good one, and the mob were made aware of it, for catching the wolfish dog in the high noon and carnival of his bloody revels—in the very centre of his own shambles. For a moment the mob was self-baffled by its own numbers and its own fury.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

But even that fury felt the call for self-control. It was evident that the massy street-door must be driven in, since there was no longer any living person to co-operate with their efforts from within, excepting only a female child. Crowbars dexterously applied in one minute threw the door out of hangings, and the people entered like a torrent. It may be guessed with what fret and irritation to their consuming fury, a signal of pause and absolute silence was made by a person of local importance. In the hope of receiving some useful communication, the mob became silent. "Now listen," said the man of authority, "and we shall learn whether he is above-stairs or below." Immediately a noise was heard as if of some one forcing windows, and clearly the sound came from a bedroom above. Yes, the fact was apparent that the murderer was even yet in the house: he had been caught in a trap. Not having made himself familiar with the details of Williamson's house, to all appearance he had suddenly become a prisoner in one of the upper rooms. Towards this the crowd now rushed impetuously. The door, however, was found to be slightly fastened; and, at the moment when this was forced, a loud crash of the window, both glass and frame, announced that the wretch had made his escape. He had leaped down; and several persons in the crowd, who burned with the general fury, leaped after him. These persons had not troubled themselves about the nature of the ground; but now, on making an examination of it with torches, they reported it to be an inclined plane, or embankment of clay, very wet and adhesive. The prints of the man's footsteps were deeply impressed upon the clay, and therefore easily traced up to the summit of the embankment; but it was perceived at once that pursuit would be useless, from the density of the mist. Two feet ahead of you, a man

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

was entirely withdrawn from your power of identification ; and, on overtaking him, you could not venture to challenge him as the same whom you had lost sight of. Never, through the course of a whole century, could there be a night expected more propitious to an escaping criminal : means of disguise Williams now had in excess ; and the dens were innumerable in the neighbourhood of the river that could have sheltered him for years from troublesome inquiries. But favours are thrown away upon the reckless and the thankless. That night, when the turning-point offered itself for his whole future career, Williams took the wrong turn ; for, out of mere indolence, he took the turn to his old lodgings—that place which, in all England, he had just now the most reason to shun.

Meantime the crowd had thoroughly searched the premises of Williamson. The first inquiry was for the young granddaughter. Williams, it was evident, had gone into her room : but in this room apparently it was that the sudden uproar in the streets had surprised him ; after which his undivided attention had been directed to the windows, since through these only any retreat had been left open to him. Even this retreat he owed only to the fog and to the hurry of the moment, and to the difficulty of approaching the premises by the rear. The little girl was naturally agitated by the influx of strangers at that hour ; but otherwise, through the humane precautions of the neighbours, she was preserved from all knowledge of the dreadful events that had occurred whilst she herself was sleeping. Her poor old grandfather was still missing, until the crowd descended into the cellar ; he was then found lying prostrate on the cellar floor : apparently he had been thrown down from the top of the cellar stairs, and with so much violence that one leg was broken. After he had been thus

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

disabled, Williams had gone down to him, and cut his throat. There was much discussion at the time, in some of the public journals, upon the possibility of reconciling these incidents with other circumstantialities of the case, supposing that only one man had been concerned in the affair. That there *was* only one man concerned seems to be certain. One only was seen or heard at Marr's : one only, and beyond all doubt the same man, was seen by the young journeyman in Mrs Williamson's parlour ; and one only was traced by his footmarks on the clay embankment. Apparently the course which he had pursued was this : he had introduced himself to Williamson by ordering some beer. This order would oblige the old man to go down into the cellar ; Williams would wait until he had reached it, and would then "slam" and lock the street-door in the violent way described. Williamson would come up in agitation upon hearing this violence. The murderer, aware that he would do so, met him, no doubt, at the head of the cellar stairs, and threw him down ; after which he would go down to consummate the murder in his ordinary way. All this would occupy a minute, or a minute and a half ; and in that way the interval would be accounted for that elapsed between the alarming sound of the street-door as heard by the journeyman, and the lamentable outcry of the female servant. It is evident also, that the reason why no cry whatsoever had been heard from the lips of Mrs Williamson, is due to the positions of the parties as I have sketched them. Coming behind Mrs Williamson, unseen therefore, and from her deafness unheard, the murderer would inflict entire abolition of consciousness while she was yet unaware of his presence. But with the servant, who had unavoidably witnessed the attack upon her mistress, the murderer could not obtain the same fullness of advantage ; and *she*

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

therefore had time for making an agonising ejaculation.

It has been mentioned, that the murderer of the Marrs was not for nearly a fortnight so much as suspected ; meaning that, previously to the Williamson murder, no vestige of any ground for suspicion in any direction whatever had occurred either to the general public or to the police. But there were two very limited exceptions to this state of absolute ignorance. Some of the magistrates had in their possession something which, when closely examined, offered a very probable means for tracing the criminal. But as yet they had *not* traced him. Until the Friday morning next after the destruction of the Williamsons, they had not published the important fact, that upon the ship-carpenter's mallet (with which, as regarded the stunning or disabling process, the murders had been achieved) were inscribed the letters " J. P." This mallet had, by a strange oversight on the part of the murderer, been left behind in Marr's shop ; and it is an interesting fact, therefore, that, had the villain been intercepted by the brave pawnbroker, he would have been met virtually disarmed. This public notification was made officially on the Friday, viz., on the thirteenth day after the first murder. And it was instantly followed (as will be seen) by a most important result. Meantime, within the secrecy of one single bedroom in all London, it is a fact that Williams had been whisperingly the object of very deep suspicion from the very first—that is, within that same hour which witnessed the Marr tragedy. And singular it is, that the suspicion was due entirely to his own folly. Williams lodged, in company with other men of various nations, at a public-house. In a large dormitory there were arranged five or six beds ; these were occupied by artisans, generally of respectable character. One or two Englishmen

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

there were, one or two Scotchmen, three or four Germans, and Williams, whose birthplace was not certainly known. On the fatal Saturday night, about half-past one o'clock, when Williams returned from his dreadful labours, he found the English and Scotch party asleep, but the Germans awake : one of them was sitting up with a lighted candle in his hands, and reading aloud to the other two. Upon this, Williams said, in an angry and very peremptory tone, "Oh, put that candle out; put it out directly: we shall all be burned in our beds." Had the British party in the room been awake, Mr Williams would have roused a mutinous protest against this arrogant mandate. But Germans are generally mild and facile in their tempers; so the light was complaisantly extinguished. Yet, as there were no curtains, it struck the Germans that the danger was really none at all; for bed-clothes, massed upon each other, will no more burn than the leaves of a closed book. Privately, therefore, the Germans drew an inference, that Mr Williams must have had some urgent motive for withdrawing his own person and dress from observation. What this motive might be, the next day's news diffused all over London, and of course at this house, not two furlongs from Marr's shop, made awfully evident; and, as may well be supposed, the suspicion was communicated to the other members of the dormitory. All of them, however, were aware of the legal danger attaching, under English law, to insinuations against a man, even if true, which might not admit of proof. In reality, had Williams used the most obvious precautions, had he simply walked down to the Thames (not a stone's-throw distant), and flung two of his implements into the river, no conclusive proof could have been adduced against him. And he might have realised the scheme of Courvoisier (the murderer of Lord William Russell)—viz., have sought

THE RATCLIFFE MURDERS

each separate month's support in a separate well-concerted murder. The party in the dormitory, meantime, were satisfied themselves, but waited for evidences that might satisfy others. No sooner, therefore, had the official notice been published as to the initials J. P. on the mallet, than every man in the house recognised at once the well-known initials of an honest Norwegian ship-carpenter, John Petersen, who had worked in the English dockyards until the present year; but, having occasion to revisit his native land, had left his box of tools in the garrets of this inn. These garrets were now searched. Petersen's tool-chest was found, but wanting the mallet; and, on further examination, another overwhelming discovery was made. The surgeon, who examined the corpses at Williamson's, had given it as his opinion that the throats were not cut by means of a razor, but of some implement differently shaped. It was now remembered that Williams had recently borrowed a large French knife of peculiar construction; and accordingly, from a heap of old lumber and rags, there was soon extricated a waistcoat, which the whole house could swear to as recently worn by Williams. In this waistcoat, and glued by gore to the lining of its pocket, was found the French knife. Next, it was matter of notoriety to everybody in the inn, that Williams ordinarily wore at present a pair of creaking shoes, and a brown surtout lined with silk. Many other presumptions seemed scarcely called for. Williams was immediately apprehended, and briefly examined. This was on the Friday. On the Saturday morning (*viz.*, fourteen days from the Marr murders), he was again brought up. The circumstantial evidence was overwhelming; Williams watched its course, but said very little. At the close, he was fully committed for trial at the next sessions; and it is needless to say, that, on

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

his road to prison, he was pursued by mobs so fierce, that, under ordinary circumstances, there would have been small hope of escaping summary vengeance. But upon this occasion a powerful escort had been provided; so that he was safely lodged in jail. In this particular jail at this time, the regulation was, that at five o'clock P.M. all the prisoners on the criminal side should be finally locked up for the night, and without candles. For fourteen hours (that is, until seven o'clock on the next morning) they were left unvisited, and in total darkness. Time, therefore, Williams had for committing suicide. The means in other respects were small. One iron bar there was, meant (if I remember) for the suspension of a lamp; upon this he had hanged himself by his braces. At what hour was uncertain: some people fancied at midnight. And in that case, precisely at the hour when, fourteen days before, he had been spreading horror and desolation through the quiet family of poor Marr, now was he forced into drinking of the same cup presented to his lips by the same accursed hands.

APPENDIX

Appendix

I HAVE included in these Ecstasies the Postscript to the essay *On Murder considered as One of the Fine Arts* because, while De Quincey himself did not class it as an example of his mode of impassioned prose, it seems to me a supreme example. In lower key than the extravagant play of the essay itself, this Postscript is a masterpiece of narrative and atmosphere. Nobody who reads it can ever forget it. Once it is read, the word "Ratcliffe" is never again the name of a place merely. For you it is charged with everything of the dark, the sinister, and the fearful; and at sight or hearing of the word the satanic power by which he quickened a ghastly East End slaughter into a piece of living literature will again heat your mind and re-create the figures and the story.

In a note to the first collected issue of his writings he apologizes for the diffuseness of the narrative. I cannot see that any apology is needed. Such an apology appended to the *Confessions* would, I think, have been in place. In those papers are many *longueurs* that we could well spare; here I cannot see one superfluous paragraph. This is clearly a case where first thoughts were best: the hasty draft achieves what a considered revision would doubtless have marred. He meant to write a footnote. Instead he immortalized a murderer and wrote what I consider the finest 'horror' short story in English. Had he 'packed' his narrative it might have gained as a statement; it certainly would have lost half its effect as a story. By accident he lit on just the right treatment of his subject, for it is by its very meandering length and scattered detail that it reproduces the spirit of the actual events and fills the reader with the story's fit sense of lingering horror and impending climax. It was a subject made to his hand, and his feeling for dramatic moments here had constant awakening and constant response. Each crisis leads to another, and in one at least of these he achieves an effect almost comparable to the effect which

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

he noted in the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*: I mean the slamming of the door before the murder of the Williams. It gives the genuine æsthetic shudder, and to one reader it has given something more. Since first reading the story—at eighteen—I have never heard a door slam at night without thinking involuntarily, "Williams is here!"

So deep was the impression the story made upon me that often, in my wanderings about its scenes, I have tried to locate the various points of the maraudings of John Williams—the Pear Tree public-house where he lodged and where he left the proofs that condemned him; Marr's shop; Williamson's public-house; and, particularly, the cross-road where he lies. But I have had no key. I have known Ratcliffe Highway (now St George Street) and the neighbouring streets these many years, and often have made guesses at this or that old tavern as once the Pear Tree. The difficulty is not in finding a spot with Ambrose Bierce's "suitable surroundings," for the whole of this district, respectable though it is to-day, is thick with suitable surroundings for such a story. Any one of a dozen places has the air of belonging to Mr Williams and his affairs. It still, at night, has much in features and style that make it classic setting for dreadful murder. The monstrous black stone wall of the London Dock that marks its beginning at East Smithfield, higher far than the walls of Pentonville or Dartmoor, sends deep shadows well along it; and the mannikin alleys that drop down to Pennington Street or pass northward into little closes, the craven shops (most of them as they were in 1811), the general litter and decay, the converted taverns (once crimping-dens, now mission-halls), the sparse lamp-light, and the silence and loneliness imposed by the vast territory of the dock and its waters—all these effuse an atmosphere that Mr Williams would find little changed from his time, except that now it is miserably respectable, and in his time it was anything but that. Looking at it to-day, you feel that if it was—as we know it was—a street in form and feature much as it now is, then it was a street that must have *asked* for a

APPENDIX

grim story: it has that demeanour. Mr Williams gave it that story, and now it lies between breath and death. It is not dreadful in the sense of dread hovering: it is cadaverous with dread experienced.

So, moving about it at night, one might hazard, and by their aspect be justified in the hazard, that this was the Pear Tree, and that was the watch-house, and this cross-road marks the end of that three weeks of horror that began on a Saturday midnight of December and ended on New Year's Eve, and between those dates spread far from Ratcliffe—spread, indeed, across England. But without the key one's hazards are vain. Once I had the key I was able to make precise locations; and the cross-road, when I discovered it, was none of the cross-roads that I had picked upon.

De Quincey, marvellous artist in the handling of facts and the clothing of them with his essence, was unconcerned, as an artist should be, with facts that were not to his immediate purpose; and it is proof of the power of his narrative that he leaves the reader with the desire to know all facts. He does tell us that the Marrs' shop was at No. 29 in the Highway. This, though the numbering has been changed, I identified some time ago, and very markedly the ramshackle place fits the frightful scenes of which it was the setting. Of the scene of the second *coup*, when the Williamson family was exterminated, he says only that it was a public-house, "if not in Ratcliffe Highway, at any rate immediately round the corner." With my key I was able to discover the full address of this house, and to see that it was useless. It was the King's Arms, 81 New Gravel Lane. To-day there is no King's Arms and no 81, for that portion of New Gravel Lane is now bordered by the blank wall of the East Dock of the London Dock. On the location of that "quadrivium or conflux of four roads," where Mr Williams was laid to rest, with a stake driven through him, and where "over him drives for ever the uproar of unresting London," De Quincey is silent, as he is silent on the ceremony of interment; and, wanting a key, I could find no detail of evidence to stiffen any one of my conjectures.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Then, the other day, there came into my possession, in an 'odd lot,' two soiled newspapers, faded and foxed—London papers—and I was started once more on the fascinating business of checking and annotating this masterpiece upon a masterpiece. In my paper I found two columns—a 'follow-up' on the late horrid and unparalleled murders in Ratcliffe—and I now know the precise spot where lie the remains of the supreme artist in his calling, the man who inspired a greater piece of literature than did any of his more famous and romanticized fellows—Dick Turpin, Eugene Aram, George Barnwell, William Corder.

De Quincey, as I say, omitted facts that were not essential to his atmosphere, but he was sometimes casual with the facts that he did handle. The tone of his narrative suggests that he was writing from memory, and here and there his memory deceived him. Certainly it deceived him in one point—namely, the year of the murders. He gives the date as December 1812; my paper is dated 1811. The first murder was committed at midnight, December 7-8, 1811, the second on December 20; and before the year 1812 was born Mr Williams was under the cross-road. Other small points I have noted where he is using either baseless gossip or ill-remembered statements read at the time.

He tells us that Marr had a little business in which he had invested his savings of £180, and that he was in difficulties—that business was bad and that bills were falling due. My report, stressing the fact that the murderer-robbers (*sic*) must have been disturbed by the return of the servant before they could get at the money, states that a cash-box containing £152 in cash was left untouched, besides a good deal of loose money in Marr's pockets. £152 in cash on a £180 business does not sound like pending bankruptcy.

He describes Williams as a man of the middle height, with *lemon*-coloured hair, and a face at all times of a "bloodless ghastly pallor." The reporter who was present at the examination describes him as a stout man of nearly six feet, of *fresh* complexion and *sandy* hair. De Quincey says that his manners were dis-

APPENDIX

tinguished by exquisite suavity. Landladies and other witnesses speak repeatedly of his fighting habits; and a shipmate, John Frederick Richter,¹ states that the captain of the *Roxburgh Castle*, Indiaman, on which Williams was employed, had observed, by way of comment on his general character, that next time Williams went ashore he would surely be hanged. (His stay ashore in December 1811 *was* the next time.)

My paper tells me that the Williamsons' granddaughter was fourteen, not nine, as De Quincey states; and where he got the material for his breathless description of the young journeyman's desperate endeavours to save his little playmate, the granddaughter, I do not know. From the examination it is clear that the young lodger, John Turner, was not on that occasion a hero. There *was* a hero, but De Quincey does not name him. The truth is, John Turner ran away; and, remembering the circumstance of sudden midnight awakening, brain and resolution inactive, and the cry from below of "Murder," and the long-drawn horror that had held the district for twelve days, who can blame him? He ran away and ran into the arms of the real hero. The bravest act performed in those uneasy nights—braver far than the act of the pawnbroker who first entered the Marrs' shop; for at that time murder was not suspected, whereas now the murder of the Marrs was a fact and the unknown murderer of the Marrs, clothed in a superstitious legend of demonism and invulnerability, was believed to be the monster now in the house and slaughtering the Williamsons—as brave an act as ever was performed by man was performed, not by the fleeing young lodger, but by an aged night-watchman, George Fox. (My reporter's only tribute to him is that he showed "great resolution.") He it was who caught the lodger in his arms as he slid down his rope of sheets; he it was who sent for a crowbar, broke open the door, and first entered that house of blood to search for the unearthly and all-powerful butcher.

¹ It was another John Frederick Richter, namely, Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, whose work was De Quincey's early inspiration to "impassioned prose."

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Turner's story is that he was awakened by a cry. He stole downstairs and saw a man in a shabby bearskin coat stooping over the battered body of Mrs Williamson, which lay by the fireside. He waited to see no more, but ran upstairs, intending to escape by the roof. In his fright, he says, he could not find the trap-door in the roof. He therefore flew to his room, and, tying the sheets and blankets of his bed together, he slipped them round the bedpost and descended through the window. (No word, you see, of his little playmate.) It was George Fox who discovered her and carried her to safety, and she was not, as De Quincey says, preserved from all knowledge of the dreadful events: with the lodger and the night-watchman she was examined by the Shadwell magistrates early in the morning.

Only by the study of the contemporary reports of these butcheries does one realize what masterpieces they were, and how surely they must have caught the imagination and drawn upon themselves the glow of the bizarre genius of the opium-eater. Masterpieces they were in their wholesale character (seven people in two homes); in the choice of setting (accidental, but then the perfecting stroke of the artist is often accidental); in their timing (winter-midnight); and in (another accident) the striking names of the people concerned either in the fact or after its accomplishment. These last have the air of belonging to a masterpiece, as though they had been deliberately devised by a romancer using the weight of names to 'point' his story. De Quincey cannot have known—or, if he once knew, had forgotten—these names. Otherwise the *Postscript* would be longer by a page—a fine dark page on the nomenclature of calamities. He speaks only of "Mr and Mrs Marr," "Mr and Mrs Williamson," and "Mr Williams." Here is a list of the names of those concerned: *Timothy Marr, Margaret Jewell, Jack Cahill, James Biggs, Susan Hoare, Michael Cathperson, John Frederick Richier, Reuben Stroud, Sylvester Driscoll, Thomas Dienon, Mrs Vermillon.*

By all the saints of the Elephant and Castle, were ever such names brought together in such a story? And, on top of them, with a stroke of that blind irony

APPENDIX

that mocks the calamities of daily life, comes the villain, wearing the homespun name of *John Williams*. But happily—for it is against all the law of poetics and all the occultism of names that anyone called John Williams *could* have committed these outrages—happily we are saved from the bite of this irony, and fitness is vindicated. De Quincey maintains him and his crimes in the name of John Williams. He had no right to that name. I find from my paper that the name “John Williams” was an *alias*, and his shipmates knew it to be so. The authorities, acting on this knowledge, issued illustrated handbills and advertised descriptions of his person, calling for his relatives, so that his works might be catalogued under his true name. But his relatives, if he had any, kept quiet, and his name was never discovered. But it was known that he was an Irishman, and a glance through the names suggests that the name for him, suitable to both his private and dramatic characters, would be that of an innocent suspect, Sylvester Driscoll. Surely a man born to that name, or to the name of Vermillon, was destined for the Chamber of Horrors. They have the poetic ring of villainy, those names.

The name Williams, we may guess, was assumed without much deliberation for its common and unobtrusive air. Your inept criminal always thinks that he can escape by hiding or by looking innocent, and always, when changing his name, makes the mistake of choosing a pattern a little *too* plain, a little *too* insistent on the workaday. He will register at hotels as William Smith or John Brown—names that by their very simplicity arouse suspicion. Your expert knows better: he registers as Philip Ponsonby or Hilary Blenheim or Victor St Albans, and, by openly claiming attention, disarms it. That is the one blemish on Williams’ record. We grant him the title of artist in the performance of his murders, but in covering his tracks he was no better than the average bungler. He did not go so far in ineptitude as to run away and hide, but he did leave clues behind him, and he did assume a transparent *alias*.

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

. It is possible, though, so charged is this tale with poetic fitness, that he took the name deliberately, from some playful memory of that other midnight prowler of twenty years before him—Williams the Monster, forerunner, 1789–90, of Jack the Ripper. And perhaps this Williams, too, in his turn, borrowed the honest cloak of “Williams” to muffle the syllables of a name that whispered his true character. I hope so, for in general the plain English names have been undarkened by the shadow of the scaffold. True, we have had William Palmer and George Joseph Smith, but never anything so downright and breezy as John Williams or Harry Brown or Charlie Robinson. There is a norm in these matters, and the names generally run true. Repeat them to yourself—Crippen, Deeming, Muller, Dougall, Thurtell, Brownrigg, Neil Cream, Crossman, Seddon, Peace, Manning. If you were shown that list, would you for a moment believe that it was a list of the British Cabinet or a cricket eleven? (Note, by the way, the persistent sequence of double letters—Deeming, two e’s; Crippen, two p’s; Muller, Dougall, Thurtell, two l’s; Seddon, two d’s; Manning, two n’s, Crossman, two s’s; Brownrigg, two g’s; and Barnwell, Ansell, Morrison, Lee, Fenning, Ferrers, Sweeney Todd, Kennedy—all murderers. Another page for De Quincey.)

Not only in the æsthetic harmony of style, setting, and *dramatis personæ* were the exploits of this illiterate assassin marked from ordinary murders, as though he were, indeed, as De Quincey apostrophizes him, directed from hell: there is also a curious fatality of dates. He began work on December 8,¹ when his neighbours were thinking cheerfully of coming Christmas parties. He was arrested on Christmas Eve. He died on Boxing Day. He was dragged to his grave on New Year’s Eve. He set his festival of blood in that season when London was observing the festival of goodwill, and the stages of his end are marked by the very days that are the high days of that season.

His arrest was made on December 24; and a very

¹ December 8 was (in 1859) the death-day of the man who immortalized him.

APPENDIX

casual arrest it was, for he was but one among many. At that time, in Ratcliffe and Shadwell, they were arresting everybody who had any air of the vagrant, and when they took him they did not guess what they had taken. On the morning following the murder of the Marrs five Portuguese sailors were detained. On December 20, a few hours after the discovery of the Williamson murders, Sylvester Driscoll was arrested, simply because the Williamsons had kept a public-house and Mr Driscoll was carrying under his coat four bottles of spirit which he appeared anxious to conceal from the constables. His story, that he was "just laying a little drop in, as usual, for Christmas," was found to be true, but only after the police had proved upon him that he had "laid it in" from the warehouses of the London Docks. On December 23 a man named Cahill was arrested at Marlborough and brought to London. He was a tall man, with sandy hair and whiskers, and spoke with a strong Irish accent. In many details he answered the description of the man seen by John Turner bending over the body of Mrs Williamson, and by two witnesses, during the evening of the night of the murders, lurking in the passages of the Williamsons' tavern. To help matters forward he volunteered that he had lately worked for a Mr Williamson in a street near Ratcliffe Highway; and, having led the magistrates well up the garden, he sat down to admire the view. But when it began to cloud over, when witness after witness came forward to identify him as the man seen lurking about the passages of the King's Arms, and as a man who had slept the night before at a house near New Crane Wharf, then, as he saw the clouds taking the shape of a rope, he quickly came indoors. The witnesses were liars, and he was a liar. He had but once been in London, and then only for a few hours. He had never worked in Ratcliffe—never been in Ratcliffe. He could bring landlord and landlady from the country to prove that at ten o'clock on the night of both murders he was asleep in their house. He had made the statement about working for the Williamsons in the hope of concealing his true case

THE ESCAPES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

--that of a deserter who was wanted at Reading Barracks by the Army.

Arrests were made every day, but on December 24, among five suspected persons presented to the magistrates for examination, was one, John Williams, a seafaring man. He too answered the description of the tall man with sandy hair seen by John Turner; and as various points about him were brought out the magistrates saw that they were, with this man, 'warmer' than they had yet been. He had no friends to back his story, and he was an unsatisfactory witness, giving laboured explanations of some matters and refusing to answer on others. On his own admission he had spent the fatal Thursday evening in the bar of the Williamsons' house, as he often did. On the evidence of others he had been seen going back to the King's Arms at about eleven o'clock; he did not return to his lodgings until one o'clock, and on the day following he sent to his laundress a shirt much stained with blood.

He was remanded until December 27 for further examination. On the morning of December 27, when the magistrates assembled at Shadwell police office, the officer sent to Coldbath Fields to bring Williams before them in safe custody brought them the news that a few hours earlier he had hanged himself in his cell by his neckcloth. By this they knew that they had secured *one* of the murderers. Not until ten days later did they surely know that there was no more than one.

That Williams had intended self-destruction after perceiving the magistrates' attitude toward him may be inferred from the evidence of the gaoler of the watch-house. In Williams' pocket, after his death, was found a piece of iron hoop, sufficiently sharp, if properly used, to inflict a mortal wound. This piece of hoop was not found upon him when he was arrested, nor when he was lodged in a temporary lock-up at the Liebeck's Head public-house opposite the Shadwell police office. After the examination he was ordered, for greater security, to the new House of Correction at Coldbath Fields, and apparently on arriving there was not searched. Inspection of the room at the Liebeck's

APPENDIX

Head showed that part of the iron pillar ~~that~~ supported the roof of the room had been broken away, and the part found upon the body of Williams precisely fitted the fracture. Clearly it was his intention to put an end to his life in that room with that instrument, but on being taken to Coldbath Fields he changed his plan. The room at the Liebeck's Head had no fittings; the cell at Coldbath Fields was conveniently fitted with an iron girder over which prisoners could throw their clothes—or a rope. It may be that he found the piece of iron hoop not sharp enough for his purpose; it may be that he felt that hanging would be cleaner and surer. Whatever his motive for changing his plan, he did change it and did hang himself.

He saw that it was the end, and he hoped to cheat the law. So far as his conscious self was concerned, he did cheat it. Had he abided the natural course, he would have been plainly hanged and simply buried. Hanging, by other hands than his own, he escaped; but by his act he brought upon his body and upon his name such abomination and obloquy as has seldom, if ever, been visited upon a criminal. But did he, perhaps, in his ignorant vanity—for vain and fastidious in many things he was—did he desire and, by this act, ensure a public interment? That we do not know, but we do know that a public interment he had, dressed in every circumstance of contumely.

Tyburn hangings, cart-tail floggings of men, Bride-well floggings of women, Smithfield burnings—these do not invest the imagination with more of horror than a certain procession on New Year's Eve, 1811, through four little back streets of East London.

At ten o'clock on the night of December 30 four men went from Ratcliffe Highway to Coldbath Fields, and there demanded delivery of the body of John Williams. They were the high constable of the parish, his deputy, the tax-collector, and a regular constable. On production of the body the high constable, the tax-collector, and the regular constable, considering their duty done, entered a hackney-coach and went home. To the deputy was left the task of following them in a separate coach,

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

alone with the corpse, across the midnight streets of London from Clerkenwell to Shadwell watch-house.

At nine o'clock in the morning the interment began, marked with all the form and pageantry that is reserved for the interment of the great. It differed only in its attendant details. Around the outside of the watch-house gathered the high constable and his staff, and soon after nine o'clock came a cart that had been expressly made as the bier of John Williams. It had been made with the purpose of giving the greatest possible exposure to the body and the face. The floor of the cart was low on the wheels and without sides. Over the floor a slanting platform had been built. When the body was brought from the watch-house it was placed upon this inclined platform, with the head toward the horse, so elevated as to be fully exposed. Ropes were passed under the arms and fastened to the driver's seat. The body was dressed in a pair of blue pantaloons and white shirt. It was without coat or waistcoat, and the sleeves of the shirt were rolled well back. Around the neck was loosely strung the scarf by which he had ended his life. My paper tells me that the face was fresh and unmarked, but that there were livid spots upon the arms. From the general appearance of the body he would have been about thirty years of age. When he was properly fixed in position the programme of burying a great artist was followed by placing upon the bier his palette and brushes. To the right of the head was tied the mall and ripping-chisel by which the Marrs were murdered. To the left was fixed the iron crow employed upon the Williamsons. Above the head was laid the stake that was to be driven through the body.

At half-past ten the procession had formed and began to move. It was led by a body of the principal parish officers, mounted on grey horses—the deputy constable, the tax-collector, and four other officers. Behind these came a troop of constables, head-boroughs and patrols of St George's with drawn cutlasses. Behind these came the beadle of St George's, in his dress of office, and then the high constable. Here followed the cart with the body, behind that a full troop of constables

APPENDIX

and watchmen, and behind *them*, as you may imagine, "an immense cavalcade of the inhabitants of the two parishes." Never before or since, I suppose, have those narrow streets held such a close-set mass of faces. My paper estimates that over ten thousand people were present.

The procession moved slowly down the Highway, eastward, and on arriving opposite the shop of the Marrs it halted for ten minutes. If you have ever seen Ratchliffe Highway (or St George Street) the scene will present itself clearly to the eye, for, save for the extension of the dock and a rebuilt shop here and there, the street to-day is, as I have said, what it was on that December morning of 1811. Every shop in the little street was shuttered. Every ground-floor window was curtained, and every upstairs window filled with heads. Pavements and alley-mouths were thronged with the mixed crowd that still belongs to the district—the local workpeople, sailors, negroes, Chinese, Scandinavians. A December morning in that river district, we may surmise, would be grey and damp. Daylight, indeed, in those down-river stretches can be, and often is, positively ashen. In that ashen light, then, through the mean streets of the dockside comes, slowly and almost in silence, save for an occasional muttered curse, that cart with its dreadful burden—a wan, half-naked corpse dragged through a corridor of wan life, point by point through the very streets where it had trod in life, and where it had robbed the innocent of life.

From the Marrs' shop the cart was led down Old Gravel Lane, through New Market Street, along Wapping High Street, and up New Gravel Lane. There, outside the King's Arms, the home of the Williamsons, it again halted for ten minutes. During those ten minutes the spectacle, terrible as it was, was heightened by a touch of the macabre and grisly that even Williams himself, had he lived to perfect his art, could not have surpassed. In the silence—that tremendous silence of a multitude centred on one thought, a silence far keener than the silence of an empty countryside—a hackney-coachman, who had halted his coach

THE ECSTASIES OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY

near the top of the lane, looked down, bent from his seat, uncurled his whip, and with a pointed oath delivered across the dead face three short-arm lashes.

The procession now re-entered Ratcliffe Highway, and turned up Cannon Street to the Turnpike Gate, where four roads met—namely, the new road to Whitechapel, the road into Sun Tavern Fields, the road to Wellclose Square, and Cannon Street itself. (This is the direction given by my paper.) Outside the Turnpike House a hole about four feet deep, three feet long, and two feet wide had been dug. It was purposely so dug to these measurements that the body should not lie at full length. At half-past twelve precisely the body was pushed from the inclined platform and crammed neck and heels into the hole. Immediately that was done the stake was driven through the body with the mallet that had been used for his murders, and on the last blow of the mallet the crowd, so long bound in silence by the grotesque pomp of the affair, broke into a frenzy of groans and shouts that lasted many minutes. The officers waited to see the hole filled in and rammed down; then all who had formed the procession dispersed their several ways.

For some days I could not locate this "new road to Whitechapel" or Sun Tavern Fields, but with the help of old maps I found them. This road is the continuation of Cannon Street Road into Commercial Road East. The road to Sun Tavern Fields (now built over) and Wellclose Square is now Cable Street. Cable Street runs alongside what was the Blackwall Railway. It is lined with warehouses and goods yards. It is one of the busiest streets of East London, and it is paved with stone setts. Day and night iron-wheeled lorries, horse and motor, grind across these setts in and out of the goods yards and down to the docks, and it is here, precisely in the centre of the roadway, where Cannon Street Road meets Cable Street, that Mr Williams lies; and here, as De Quincey said, with more truth than in 1854 he knew—here "over him drives for ever the uproar of unquieting London!"

T. B.